

AZURE CITIES

STORIES
OF NEW
RUSSIA

502

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Translated by
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BY

ROMANOV, PILNIAK, SEIFULLINA
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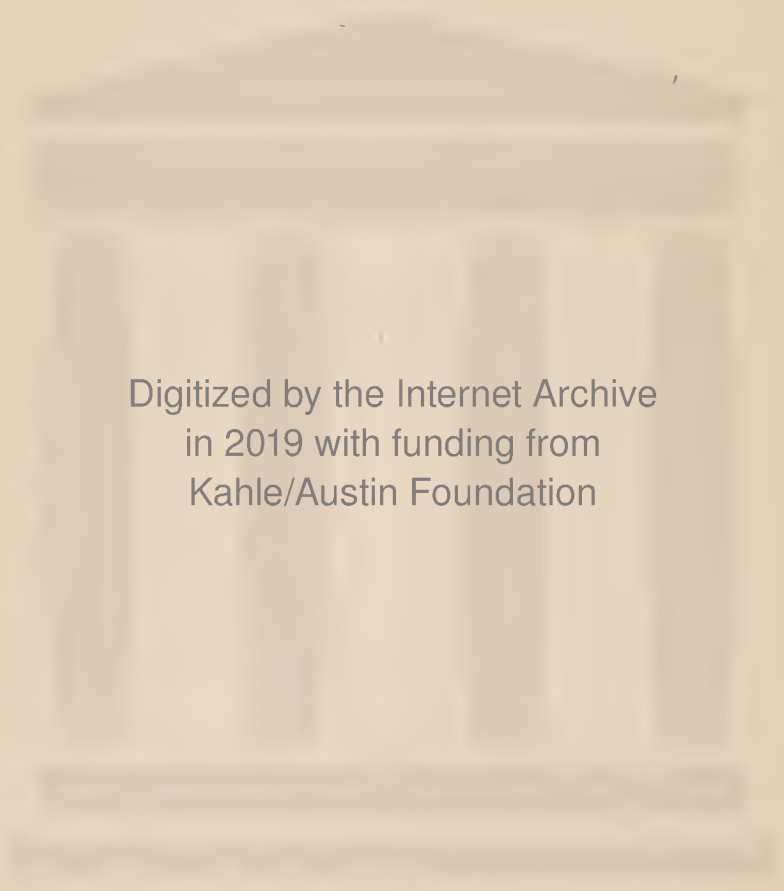
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INTRODUCTION

THE thunderbolt of the November Revolution brought consternation and dismay into the camp of the Russian literati. For the most part symbolists and decadents, theosophists and anthroposophists, Messiahs and prophets, they had for over two decades been acclaiming the signs and portents of the approaching cataclysm. Some had apocalyptic visions of a third hypostasis, others worshipped at the mystical altar of a vague and ethereal "beautiful lady," still others peered into the chaos of eternity and saw nothing but "horror and madness, madness and horror," while many assumed gloomy airs and demoniacal poses, parading their sexual perversions under the amoral cloak of Nietzschean supermen. Lovers of delicacies, literary gourmands, they poured their vapourous content into exquisitely moulded poetic amphoras which reflected a cold and pale light over the sullen gloom of Russian reaction. And when the proletarian revolution came, these anemic creatures of a sunless age were dazed by the flame and the thunder of the mighty eruption. Even the realists, even the erstwhile Social Democrats and Social Revolutionists became maddened with fright. Korolenko and even Gorky showed signs of weakness and vacillation, while men like Bunin and Kuprin turned counter-revolutionists. Andreyev shrieked an hysterical "S O S." Others scuttled hastily into their holes, staring with futile anger at the "debacle" of Russia, and waiting for an opportunity to run into other lands where they could safely spit poison at the spectre of the "mob triumphant." Only a few remained in Russia, "islanders within," proud and embittered relics of an irrevocable past.

True, there were exceptions. Valery Briusov, the "graceful figure of the Moscow Mephistopheles," forgot that

*Devoted to Fancy, he ever
Worshipped Beauty, unearthly remote.*

and began to chant hymns to the Revolution:

*Love this mass, though it be vulgar;
Love it, though it savage seem.
Love its curses, love its anger,
But above all love its dream.*

Russian Futurism

But Briusov, Biely, Blok, Gorky, Serafimovich, Veresaiev, and a few others constituted only a small contingent; on the whole, it is safe to assert that the older generation of Russian writers were solidly arrayed against the November Revolution. Indeed, the fugitive writings of the first two years are permeated with a spirit of implacable hatred for the new régime. The youth of the country, the future poets and singers, were strewn on all fronts, and it began to look as if the Muse of poetry had deserted Russia. It was then that the Futurists emerged from the murk of doss-houses and Bohemian cafés into the brilliant light of official favour and universal adulation. The story of futurism is as dramatic as the story of Cinderella. Obscure and neglected, ridiculed by the high-priests of the old Art, the Futurists had had to resort to all kinds of stunts and buffoonery to attract attention: earrings, fantastically painted waistcoats, shockingly egotistic behaviour, hooliganism. They hated the bourgeois world with the unquenchable hatred of the unrecognised, they despised its conventions, its complacency, its smugness. And now that the Revolution came, it was they, the disinherited ones, who hastened to acclaim it. The proletarian slipper fitted them to perfection. Under the able generalship of Vladimir Maiakovsky, they rushed into the squares, clambered tribunals, invaded the sacred precincts of the old academies, flaunting the

Gospel of a new, futurist, revolutionary Art. There was no competition. The old writers had deserted the field. Maiakovsky became the pampered child of the Revolution.

The militant mood of that period finds its echo in the extravagant claims of the early Futurists: theirs is "the only path leading toward the development of a universal art"; bourgeois art is "life distorting rather than life creating"; the material of art is not the "idea" of a thing, but the "thing" itself; literature is a craft, the artist a worker, and the worker must be an artist, he "must become an intelligent, active participator in the creative process of making objects. Then the need for a special caste of decorative artists will disappear; art will be employed in the very process of producing things."

Considering themselves craftsmen, the Futurists emphasised the creation of language and literary forms. Instead of using the living forms and intelligible language of the masses, they tried to create and inflict upon the people a new art, one which, in their opinion, would more adequately meet the needs of modern life. As a result their verses were more often philological exercises than real poetry, and with the exception of the talented Maiakovsky, they have produced little of lasting value. Neither in their conception of life nor in their practice of the arts have they succeeded in being the exponents of the proletariat. Their hegemony was brief. Under the name of Lef (Left front), they still carry on a precarious existence as one of the literary groups in Russia.

With the decline of Futurism, a host of other literary movements entered the arena: Ego-Futurists, Imagists, Bioscosmists, Formlibrists, Emotionalists, Expressionists, Luminists, Nichevokis, Neo-Classicists, Constructivists, etc. A motley crowd of cultural crusaders, each carrying his own æsthetic panacea, each striving for official recognition, and state support. Of these the Imagists were the noisiest and the most nihilistic. "Destroy the old syntax," was their motto; "destroy the old grammar; down with the verb,

away with the preposition; place the word upside down, this is the most natural position for the word if it is to give birth to a new image; the image is more significant than life, the image makes life." Yet not even these movements were completely sterile; for just as Futurism had found its best expression in the gifted work of Maiakovsky, so did Imagism express itself most compellingly in the beautiful poetry of the young peasant-poet Yessenin, and Constructivism in Selvinsky's great epic poem "Ulialiaievshchina."

As one reads the annals of this tumultuous period, one cannot help being inspired by this dynamic manifestation of the human spirit, by Man's quest for Beauty. Visualise Russia then: internecine war, blockade, invasion, hunger; no fuel, no light, no paper; death and sickness stalking across the tortured fields of this once great empire. But in the dim cafés of Moscow and Leningrad frozen, half-starved poets, critics, artists, and æsthetes, would come together, recite their poetry, read their criticisms, and shout themselves hoarse in mutual praise or denunciation. Things could not be published because of the paper famine; the poets used the café as their rostrum.

Ephemeral though all of these movements proved, they were symptomatic of the terrific psychological fermentation going on in Russia. As on the battlefields, as on the various fronts, as in the village and the town, here, too, the old met the new in a life and death struggle. Issues had to be clarified, ideas crystallised. The intellectual leaders of the proletariat had for decades studied the problems and tactics of the political and social revolution; when the moment struck, the workers had more or less a plan of action. The problems of the cultural revolution had been less thoroughly worked out. Moreover, the workers and peasants were too ignorant and utterly unprepared to take the lead in matters of art and learning; they had to rely on those of the old intelligentsia who were willing to co-operate. The situation was paradoxical. Here were the Futurists, the Imagists, and the rest of them, who both ideo-

logically and temperamentally represented the disintegrating element within bourgeois art, the infected products of the old Bohemia, attempting to assume the rôle of the artistic dictators of the Workers' and Peasants' Soviet Republic. In their hatred and denunciation of the old art, they had overreached themselves, their rebellion was for the most part a rebellion against externals, they knew too much, they were too sophisticated, they were sick of old forms.

The "Smithy" Group

Neither the workers nor the peasants could be won over to such an attitude—they were neither sophisticated nor sick of old forms; they had no artistic prepossessions. All they wanted was a good poem, story, picture, or statue presented to them in intelligible contour; be it realism, or symbolism, or anything else. In the arts they wanted to find a reflection of their own experience, their own problems, their own emotions. They simply refused to be bludgeoned into acceptance of formalist niceties, and turned hopefully to a group of proletarian writers united under the name of "The Smithy." The most outstanding of these writers, M. Gerassimov, I. Filipchenko, N. Liashko, etc., were known to the world of letters long before the Revolution. Indeed, the germ of proletarian literature had made its appearance within the womb of bourgeois society as far back as the end of the nineteenth century. In a sense, Maxim Gorky himself can be considered the harbinger of proletarian expression in literature. A great deal of proletarian verse had been written during the early years of the present century, and by 1915 over fifty volumes of such verse were published in Russia. "In 1913 out of ninety-four authors who in the course of three months sent in 450 manuscripts to be included in a collection of proletarian writings, seventy-nine were manual workers." The Revolution naturally gave this embryonic literature a powerful impetus toward further development. "Proletcult" organisations began to sprout up in the centres as well as in the

provinces. A great number of proletarian magazines made their appearance all over Russia. In May, 1920, the "Smithy" group published their first periodical. During the same year unions of proletarian writers were organised in Moscow and in many other places. Proletarian art, recruiting fresh forces from among the tens of thousands of village and factory correspondents to the daily press, began to assume a mass character. Thus the publication of "The Smithy" magazine is important, for since the Revolution it represents the first organised effort of the Russian workers to express the consciousness and ideology of *their* class in contradistinction to the bourgeois consciousness and ideology which prevailed in Russian letters heretofore.

Still, even the work of this group was purely transitional. It was abstract and romantic; full of revolutionary sentiment and universal aspirations. It was winged, it soared above sordid prose and drab every-dayness; it was permeated with a proud faith in the boundless power of the workers, and in the immediate triumph of the Communist ideal. It was lofty, enthusiastic, and in complete harmony with the Romantic urge of the early years, with the dreams of a world revolution, and the aspiration toward idealised azure cities, skyscrapers, and electricity. The present was absent in their poetry; they sang either of the dark past or of the glowing future. Their poetry gave expression to the exalted mood of the honeymoon of the Revolution, to the heroics of military Communism and victorious war, to the exuberance of pre-Nep days.

The New Prose

The conclusion of the civil war, and the introduction of the New Economic Policy brought to an end the diffuse ecstasy of the Revolution. Vague lyrical outbursts and cosmic aspirations gave way before the immediate and sober need of production, transportation, reconstruction. The fresh host of young people, just back from the battlefields, redolent with life, overflowing with experience, and rich

in unforgettable impressions, broke into print. Neither the demands of the reconstruction period, nor the complexity of the experience of the new writers could fit into the constricting moulds of poetry. A new prose was born. During the years 1921-1922 a brilliant galaxy of new prose writers appeared on the firmament. Three serious literary monthlies were established: *Pechat i Revolutsia* (Revolution and Press), *Novi Mir* (New World), *Krasnaia Nov* (Red Earth). On the pages of these magazines, particularly of the latter, a whole array of new and now famous names was first introduced. A perusal of the files of these magazines for the first few years since its establishment reveals the magnificent revival of Russian prose. In addition to the names of the older writers such as V. Veresaiev, M. Prishvin, A. Tolstoy, V. Lidin, and I. Erenburg, there appeared the names of Vsevolod Ivanov, I. Babel, B. Pilniak, K. Fedin, A. Malyshkin, L. Leonov, N. Tikhonov, N. Nikitin, A. Arosev, S. Semenov, L. Seifullina, S. Budantsev, etc. Soon, too, countless soft-covered collections of short stories and novels flooded the book-stores: Neverov, Zoshchenko, Lebedinsky, Furmanov, Novikov-Priboy, Yakovlev, P. Romanov, Zozulia, Kataev, Kasatkin, Slezkin, Sobol, etc.*

Hundreds of new themes began to make their way into literature: Civil War, hunger, the destruction and rehabilitation of industry, the changing connubial and filial relations, the departing bourgeoisie and the triumphant proletariat, the "kulak" and the nepman, the Communist and the poor peasant and the homeless waif, the new youth, the new official, the new woman, the new life.

An interesting manifestation of this period was the unprecedented development of the historical novel. Here the past is interpreted from the point of view of the present, Stenka Razin, Pugachov, the Decembrists, and the revolu-

* A similar revival took place in the literatures of the various minor nationalities throughout the Soviet Union—Ukrainian, White Russian, Georgian, Armenian, Yiddish. Even the primitive Siberian tribes began to develop their own written language, and elements of a native literature.

tions of 1905 and 1917 are presented in the light of recent developments. As in Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, the real heroes in most of these historical novels are not individuals but groups, classes, collectivities. However, neither in magnitude nor in artistic finish has Soviet Russia produced anything comparable to *War and Peace*, nor has it as yet produced writers commensurate with Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, or Turgenev, although, despite their youth, their works are not inferior to the early works of these giants.

Naturally, since not all of the young authors had the same social and cultural backgrounds, not all of them responded to the Revolution similarly. Moreover, the passing from a state of war and military Communism to that of relative peace and a New Economic Policy called for a new definition of attitudes, for basic psychological and ideological readjustments, for a closer union between the worker and peasant writers. The most fundamental problems of art and the philosophy of art had to be re-examined and restated, revised and modified. There was a reshuffling of groups, and tendencies, and literary schools.

"The Literary Guard"

Among the proletarian writers, the introduction of the Nep was responsible for a serious schism. Some of the vehement and ardent members of "The Smithy" were overwhelmed by a feeling of dejection and dismay. They were in despair over what they thought was the "capitulation" of the proletariat before the advancing battalions of the "resuscitated" bourgeoisie. Failing to grasp the economic inevitability of the phase of the Revolution embodied in the Nep, they cried over the "betrayal" of the "November" ideals. But this mood of pessimism was too unwholesome and too unwarranted to affect for long large numbers of the proletarian writers. Abandoning romantic dreams and misty abstractions, the more stable and vigorous elements of "The Smithy" withdrew, and on December 7, 1922, organised the "October" group.

The most extreme reaction against the sentimental doubts and fluctuations of "The Smithy" found expression in the periodical *Na Literaturnom Postu* (On the Literary Guard) published by the proletarian group of writers known as the Napostovtsi. Instead of despairing, the Napostovtsi called upon the class-conscious proletarian writers to close their ranks, and to wage implacable war on the slightest manifestation of bourgeois influence in literature. The Napostovtsi began to clamour for a literary dictatorship. "Only he is an artist," they claimed, "who at the present moment can instill into the minds of millions the conviction that a return to the past is impossible." Literature, they asserted, is a powerful social weapon in the hands of him who uses it effectively, and use it effectively can only he who is politically educated, who understands and is willing to expatiate upon the economic needs of the proletarian state. Confident that they were the only exponents of pure Communism, they spoke disparagingly of the past and treated disdainfully those of their contemporaries who refused to acquiesce to their literary hegemony. Their extravagant claims would have had a degree of plausibility, if not moral justification, had they demonstrated that they were real creative artists. Instead, they fought imaginary foes by hurling trenchant denunciations at the gifted writers of revolutionary Russia, those whom Trotsky had so aptly christened "fellow-travellers." Their vehemence, while contributing perhaps to a clarification of issues, resulted in very few masterpieces. On the whole, their efforts were artistically crude and immature. For all their attempts to establish a literary dictatorship, the proletarian writers were confronted with the devastating fact that the reading public preferred good literature. Indeed, it was the fellow-travellers, writers deeply rooted in the great literary traditions of Russia, who flooded the markets and who were universally read. This had a sobering effect on the young ones. They began to discover that new cultures were not made over night, that much writing did not always mean

good writing, and they began to appreciate and to learn from the old masters, the great classics of Russian literature.

The Party and The Fellow-Travellers

This change of attitude was partly due to the salutary effect of the very enlightened and unprecedented Thesis adopted by the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party in May, 1924. This Thesis showed definitely that the Party declined to take sides with any one literary school, that it expressed itself in favour of free competition in the realm of the arts in the hope that in the course of time the proletarian writers might win for themselves a position of supremacy not by crushing the other schools, but by excelling them.

The Thesis of the Central Committee was a victory for Russian literature in general, and for the fellow-travellers in particular. The term fellow-traveller, adopted by Trotsky in his *Literature and Revolution*, is of political and sociological rather than literary significance. The only three things that most of the writers placed under the general label of fellow-travellers have in common are their non-proletarian origin, their non-membership in the Communist Party, and their general acceptance of the Revolution and the dictatorship. As literary artists, however, they constitute as motley a crowd as was ever put under one heading. Even in their acceptance of the Revolution they betray a variety of unorthodox leanings—Slavophile, nationalist, populist, and mystical. What they all profess in common is the faith in a free art, and the opposition to any literary platforms. They refuse to regard their art as the instrument of any class, or the mouthpiece of any political party. Their function, they feel, is to study and depict the various aspects of Russian life. The Revolution has released mighty forces and generated curious psychological relations—these the contemporary artist must illumine; and the more obscure and elusive the problem the more fascinating a subject it is for the writer. The business of the

writer, they maintain, is to know and reflect life, not directly to mould it. His contribution is toward a deeper understanding of the great complexity of the social organism and of the countless forces playing upon each other.

Despite the conciliatory attitude of the Central Committee, the proletarian critics have until recently continued to view with suspicion the fellow-travellers' proud withdrawal into the ivory towers of "free art." As Marxists, they hold that art is the expression of group psychology; that consciously or unconsciously a writer always expresses the ideology of a definite class; and that behind the conflicts of styles, forms, and literary schools there is invariably the collision of group ideologies, and, deeper still, the collision of economic interests and of social classes. Thus, according to them, the friction between the proletarian schools and the fellow-travellers has been symptomatic of the social alignments existing in Russia. For Russia is in a period of transition, Russian society is still divided into economic groups. First, there are the older peasants with their suspicion of the city, their stolid resistance to the leadership of the proletariat, their ignorant fear of the new and the untried. Did not Yessenin, the peasant writer, exalt the horse over the locomotive? Then, the nepmen, who, though kept in subjection, are sufficiently ubiquitous to constitute a bourgeois thorn in the side of the workers' government. And is not the neutral fellow-traveller a literary counterpart of the nepman? Is not his lukewarm acceptance of the Revolution a subtle form of adaptation, a bit of unconscious protective colouring? Conciliation is all very well, but it is the duty of the proletarian critic to analyse each story, poem, or novel, and uncover its class ideology. He must expound and encourage everything revealing a proletarian trend, he must expose and render harmless everything bearing the germs of middle class or peasant predilection. Thus the positive contribution of the Napostovtsi was the stimulating effect on Russian critical thought; their attacks resulting in a clarification of issues and in a deeper under-

standing of the complexity of the problems facing the proletariat on the cultural front.

The most recent reports from Russia indicate that ever since the publication of the famous Thesis, the process of reconciliation between the proletarian writers and the fellow-travellers has been steadily gathering momentum. The reason is obvious. For just as it is true that conflicts in life breed conflicts in art, and that experimentation in economic and political forms stimulates experimentation in literary forms, so it is true that the elimination of economic contradictions and the stabilisation of social forms result in an harmonisation of literary antitheses, and in a tendency toward a sober, solid, rational art. In Russia the dichotomy in life had created a dichotomy in art—an unnatural chasm between content and form. The writers who came from the fields and the factories placed sole emphasis on proletarian content; the intellectual fellow-travellers, on literary form. But as in Russian society the distinction between proletarian and non-proletarian is gradually disappearing, the difference between the worker-writers and the fellow-travellers is also disappearing. The proletarian writers have been growing from mere content to an appreciation of form, the fellow-travellers have been so completely absorbed into Soviet life that from mere literary craftsmanship they have been steadily advancing toward an unconscious presentation of proletarian content. Undoubtedly, the two movements are growing less antagonistic and instead of numerous inimical groups and associations, there is now talk of a general, all-Russian federation of writers.

The New Literature

The story of literature is but one phase of an unfolding drama. The same struggles and contradictions, the same grapple of forces, the same extravagances and modifications are manifest in every other phase of life in Russia, and are reflected in every piece of literature produced there. Everywhere the old versus the new, old passions and new passions

in a whirlwind of passion. On the one hand, wooden, drunken, "fat-rumped" Russia, Russia of the ikon and the witch; on the other, "azure cities," electrical stations, tractors, a new Russia of schools, and workers' clubs, and children's homes. This is illustrated in practically every story in the present collection. In A. Tolstoy's "Azure Cities," for instance, we have a young civil war hero, an architect, a poet, whose glowing visions of beautiful cities are thrown against the grey background of a Russian Main Street. The smugness, the Philistinism, the vulgarity of his surroundings affect the sensitive youth so that in a moment of insanity he murders his love rival and burns the town. In the same story, too, in contradistinction to the neurotic, romantic, dreamy Buzheninov, who cannot adapt himself to the prose of "labor and sweat," there is brought out the stable, resolute Communist Khotyaintsev, who is ready to "harness the battle steed to the plow" and remould life slowly, painfully, "with muslin, and books, and the theatre, and the club."

In "Marya the Bolshevik," "Black Fritters," "The Miracle," "The Old Woman," and "Cranes" various aspects of village life are depicted. Here again we have the relation of the old to the new, the refraction of the city and of Communist ideals in the suffocating atmosphere of illiteracy, miracles, saints, and witch-doctors. These are studies in chiaroscuro: the brilliant light of the Communist ideal against the deep darkness of the peasant village. Some of the stories stress the element of light, others ("Cranes"), that of darkness. "Marya the Bolshevik" and "Black Fritters" also demonstrate the emergence of the new woman and the changing relation of husband and wife.

Pilniak's "The Law of the Wolf" also treats of the changing conceptions of conventional morals and marital relations, but, with the exception of one woman, his protagonists are not Russian, they are foreign-born Communist leaders in Russia. This suggests the international sweep of the Revolution. Here both the problem and the solution

are stated much too strongly. In a period of military necessity the Communist code of honour as described by Pilniak is magnificently heroic, but inhumanly stern.

A good-natured burlesque of the "social-consciousness" of the new youth is given in Zoshchenko's "Gold Teeth." This story also pokes fun at the early tendency in Soviet Russia to emphasise one's proletarian origin by accentuating one's proletarian exterior.

The problem in the factory, the rationalisation of industry, the harmonisation of the demands of the workers and the demands of the State, are brought out in M. Shaginian's "Three Looms"; while Liashko's "The Song of the Chains" and Lidin's "Youth," which is somewhat shortened in this collection, are dithyrambs to the continuity of life and of revolutionary tradition. In both the heroism of the past is the inspiration of the present and the promise of a radiant future. Of the many harrowing and exhilarating experiences, the Civil War has left the deepest impression on the minds of the Russian writers. A number of excellent works have been written with this as the subject: "The Iron Stream" by Serafimovich, "The Fall of Dair" by Malyshkin, "Chapaiev" and "The Mutiny" by Furmanov, "The Beavers" by Leonid Leonov, "The Armoured Train" by Vsevolod Ivanov, and many other novels and short stories. Even most of the works not directly concerned with the Civil War reveal traces of it. In the present volume, Babel's "The Letter," and Vsevolod Ivanov's "The Baby" treat of the Civil War directly; "Azure Cities," "Marya the Bolshevik," "The Old Woman," "The Song of the Chains," and "The Law of the Wolf" suggest it in the background. Both "The Letter" and "The Baby" are written in the characteristic post-revolutionary style: short, crisp, realistic. The extremes of cruelty and tenderness are described in the same terse, matter-of-fact language. In both stories the fighters are iron men waging savage war. They are primitive in their emotions, and they know little of the ultimate aim of Communism. Their Bolshevism is elemental, almost

instinctive; behind the Kolchaks and the Denikins they see the hateful ghost of the landlord. It is out of this inchoate and centrifugal material that a well-organised, disciplined, and politically educated Red Army has been finally welded.

Needless to say, not all of the stories in this volume reflect Soviet life equally well, nor are they all of equal artistic merit. Still, one thing is clear—out of the ashes of the past the Phoenix of Russian letters has arisen: new writers, new themes, a new world. Gone are the endless pre-revolutionary stories of failure and of woe; gone the Hamlets, the fantasts, the mystics; gone the frustrated self-seekers and self-tormentors. And if there are no Turgenevs and Dostoievskys as yet, the soil has been made ready for them. New voices resound—dynamic, triumphant, exulting in strength, action, achievement. New tales are told—stirring plots, colourful prose, rapid rhythms. New heroes brought forth—eager, throbbing; their hearts—steel, their blood—flame. A new Russia described—a country of colossal contrasts and contrapuntal movements, a world of tremendous contradictions labouring toward a final, lasting, all-inclusive harmony.

JOSHUA KUNITZ.

December, 1928.

AZURE CITIES

ALEXEY TOLSTOY

A Word or Two of Introduction

ONE of the witnesses, a student of the engineering school, Semyonov, was giving unexpected testimony in the more obscure, but as it later turned out, the real point of the whole investigation. What seemed to the Investigator when he first became acquainted with the events of the tragic night (between the third and fourth of July) to be a strange and crazy act or perhaps a clever simulation of insanity, now became the key to the solution of the entire case.

It became necessary to rebuild the order of the investigation, and to conduct it from the end of the tragedy—from that piece of canvas (three yards by one and one-half) which had been nailed to the telegraph post on the square of the county seat at dawn of the fourth of July.

The crime was not committed by an insane man—this had been established by the examination and by expert testimony. Most probably the criminal was in a state of extreme delirium. Nailing the canvas to the post, he had jumped down awkwardly, sprained his leg and lost consciousness. This saved

his life,—the crowd would have torn him to pieces. When questioned at the preliminary investigation he had been tremendously excited, but now the Court Investigator found him quieter and able to give an account of what had happened.

Still, it was impossible to re-construct a clear picture of the crime from his answers—the picture still fell to pieces. And it was only Semyonov's story that united all these pieces into one whole. Before the Investigator there unfolded a passionate story of a tormenting, impatient, and feverish imagination.

First News of Vassili Alexeievich Buzheninov

A little to the side of the Bezenchuk station, in what is now the Pugachov district, a Red Army transport crawled through miles of mud. Around it the brown steppe overhung by wet clouds; in the distance as dim as the three-hundred-year-old sadness of Russia, a slit of light over the edge of the steppe,—and propped telegraph posts on the side of the road. It was the autumn of 1919.

The mounted vanguard accompanying the transport ran into the signs of fresh battle in this windy desert: several dead horses, an overturned wagon, a half-score of human corpses without coats or boots. The vanguard, casting side-glances, would have passed by, but the commander suddenly turned in his saddle, and pointed his wet mitten at a telegraph post. The vanguard stopped.

Propped against the post sat a man with a scarlet face, immobile, staring at the arrivals. From his shaven skull hung a bloody rag. His baked lips moved as if he whispered to himself. Apparently he was making terrific exertions to rise, but he remained sitting as if he were made of lead. A red star was sewn to his sleeve.

When two horsemen leaped heavily from their mounts and walked towards him, slipping in the mud, he began to move his lips rapidly, his moustacheless face wrinkled, his eyes widened, white with horror and anger.

"I don't want to, I don't want to," this man murmured hurriedly. "Go away, don't hide it. . . . You don't let me see it. . . . To the devil with you. . . . We have destroyed you long ago. . . . Don't stamp before my eyes, don't bother me. . . . There, again. . . . From that mound over the river. . . . Look, you white-guard dogs, turn around. . . . You see—the bridge in the centre of the city,—the arch,—the distance between—three kilometers. . . . Made of air? No, no, that is aluminum. And the lanterns in an arc on the thinnest of posts, like needles. . . ."

The man was in delirium from spotted typhus and seemed to mistake his own for enemies. They could not find out from him to what detachment the ten men who lay by the roadside belonged. He himself had remained alive only because during the engagement he had lain wounded in the wagon which they now saw turned upside down.

They placed him in a wagon filled with oats. In

the evening they bandaged his wounds at the Bezenchuk station, and sent him on to Moscow with the nearest sanitary train. His documents were in the name of Vassili Alexeievich Buzheninov, born in the province of Smolensk, twenty-one years of age.

This man remained alive. Towards spring he recovered, and in the summer he was sent to the front again. With hundreds of others like him, Buzheninov entered and left the ruined cities of the Ukraine; hid in nut groves and cherry orchards in shooting forays against the Whites and the Greens; sat on starry nights near campfires above the Don; pushed through the mud in the steppes under the autumn wind that howled dismally between the ears of his horse and along the telegraph wires; struggled in fever in the white-hot sands of Turkestan; marched under Perekop and into Poland.

He remembered all this afterwards as if it had been a dream: the hand-to-hand fights, the songs of the hungry belly tightened with the Red Army belt, the half-ruined freight cars rushing across the plains, the roofs of villages aflame on the horizon, his comrades, now singing and carefree, now insanely angry in battle, now quiet with fatigue and hunger. His comrades, like the posts and trees that run by a train, disappeared from his memory, from his sight, went "home" into the earth. There were no individuals in those days, there were only brothers. There is that little brother who has wrapped his feet in pieces of carpeting in place of shoes, dragging porridge from the pot in such a way that the

muscles roll in your jaw, and in the evening, see, he lies with his face down, his cold fingers stuck into the earth.

That is why those years came to the memory like a dream.

Any information about the life of Vassili Alexeievich dissolves in the mist of those years. He was not ill, he was not wounded, he received no leaves of absence. Once Semyonov met him in a frontier town, in a tavern, and spent several hours in hot discussion over a bottle of moonshine. Later Semyonov said the following about that meeting:

"I graduated from the same school with Vassili Buzheninov. He was one year ahead of me. He entered the School of Architecture in Sixteen, and I the Engineering School in Seventeen.

"In the tavern we began to recall the past. Suddenly Buzheninov sprang up and grimaced. 'Why should we turn over the past? Let's speak of something else. A hundred years have passed since then. I remember how my grandmother back home in the province split each match into four for the sake of economy,—made four boxes out of one. Look at that economy now. Two and a half thousand locomotives lie useless on the scrap-heap. I ask—the war is ended,—does that mean that we have to split matches in four again? There is no return. Throw all that is old on the scrap-heap. Either we will go to the devil or we will build on those places where our brothers are rotting, build wonderful cities and powerful factories, plant blooming orchards. . . .

It's for ourselves we are building now. . . . And if for ourselves, then it must be in a real way, in a big way. . . ."

After the demobilisation Vassili Alexeievich entered the School of Architecture again and was in Moscow until the spring of 1924. Semyonov tells that Buzheninov worked all this time with a heat that resembled delirium. He actually starved. He said that once he slept in a tomb in the Don Cemetery. Women, of course, he avoided. And on his bony, rounded shoulders he still wore the same Red Army coat, bullet-riddled and covered with brown stains, in which he had once been found in the steppes of the Pugachov district.

In the beginning of April Buzheninov had a nervous breakdown. Semyonov made room for him on a couch. At that time Buzheninov received a letter from home, and read it very often, as if it were written in a language which he could understand but little. The letter excited him very much. Several times he said that he must go home for a while, otherwise he would never forgive himself. It was apparent that his imagination was overwrought.

Semyonov collected money among their friends and bought Buzheninov a railroad ticket. Two days or so before his leaving a party was arranged to celebrate the spring; at that party Buzheninov, somewhat drunk and in extreme excitement, told his friends a remarkable story.

His story is told here exactly as it was heard by his friends who had completely filled Semyonov's

room, on that evening when beyond the open window, over the roofs of Moscow, over the narrow streets striped with advertisements, over the ancient towers, over the transparent branches of the boulevard lindens, flowed bluish twilight, and the spring moon, disdained by the poets of the entire Union, stood, a narrow and icy sickle, in the evening desert.

A Hundred Years After

On April the fourteenth, 2024, I was one hundred and twenty-six years old. . . . Don't grin, comrades, I am serious now. . . . I was neither old nor young: grey, which was considered rather handsome,—my hair old ivory in colour; an angular, fresh face; a strong body, confident in its movements; a light dress, without stitches, made of wool and silk; strong sandals made from the skin of artificial organisms, the ones they called "shoe culture," which were developed in laboratories in central Africa. . . .

I had worked all morning in the shop, then I had received friends, and now, in the twilight, I had come out on the terrace of the many-storied house, leaned on the balustrade, and looked at Moscow.

Half a century earlier, when I was already dying of old age, the government had included me in the "list of youth." One could get on that list only on account of some extraordinary service performed for the people. I underwent a complete transformation according to the newest system; I was frozen in a chamber filled with nitrogen and exposed to

the action of strong magnetic currents which changed the very molecular structure of my body. Then my internal secretions were freshened by the grafting of monkey glands.

And truly my deserts were considerable. From the terrace where I stood, there opened in the bluish twilight that part of the city which was once criss-crossed by the dirty alleys of the Tverskaya. Now, descending to the blooming gardens of the Moscow River, at short distances from each other, stood twelve-storied, recessed houses of bluish cement and glass. They were surrounded by path-crossed gardens that looked like flowery carpets. Famous artists worked over this landscape. From April to October the carpets of the gardens changed their colouration and their outlines.

The terraces of the houses, recessed and with mirrorlike windows, were covered with plants and flowers. There were no chimneys, no wires above the roofs, no tramcar posts, no kiosks, no vehicles on the broad streets flanked with rich green lawns. The entire nervous system of the city had been buried underground. The used air of the houses was carried by ventilators into subterranean cleansing chambers. Beneath the ground electric trains rushed with crazy speed, carrying the population of the city at stated hours to faraway factories, business concerns, schools, universities. . . . In the city there were only theatres, circuses, halls for winter sports, stores and clubs—tremendous buildings under glass domes.

Such was the Moscow of the twenty-first century, built according to my plans. Spring-time humidity twisted in the vistas of the open streets, among the recessed houses rising to the stars, and their outlines became bluer and bluer, lighter and lighter. Here and there a narrow ray of light fell from the sky and an aeroplane landed on a roof. The twilight was informed with the music of the radio—an orchestra played taps on an island in the Pacific.

Only one century divided us from the first shots of the Civil War. On earth it was the one hundred and seventh year of the new calendar. The chemical factories had transformed the wild and austere spaces. Where once lay the tundras and the impassable swamps, wheatfields whispered for thousands of miles. The deposits of heavy metal in the North—of uranium and thorium—had at last been subjected to atomic destruction and had freed gigantic stores of radioactive energy. From the north to the South Pole along the thirtieth meridian had been laid an electromagnetic spiral. It had cost one quarter of the price of the World War. The electric energy of this polar spiral fed the stations of the entire world. There were no more frontiers between nations. Caravans of freight ships floated through the heavens. Labour became easy. The endless circles of the past centuries of struggle for a piece of bread—this sad prose of history was studied by pupils of the first grade in the schools. We had freed ourselves of the load which we had carried on our crooked backs. We straightened

up. The man of the past cannot understand these new sensations of freedom, of strength and youth.

Yes, I assure you, to live was to know great happiness, and the earth became a desirable place to live on. So I thought, looking from the terrace on the city I had built. In the air arose a thin sound, like the sound of a broken string. It was a signal. The entire city was flooded by the light of electric lamps, rows on rows of round electric lanterns disappearing towards the Moscow River, lanterns on the terraces, and floods of light from the flat roofs into the lilac sky. A glimmering egg of light, the glass roof of a club, rose on the Square of the Revolution. Low and noiselessly, like some night bird, an aeroplane dived down past the terrace, and a woman's voice cried from it. . . .

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Buzheninov did not end the story, and shamefacedly, almost pitifully smiling, looked at his friends. In his hand trembled a glass of beer. . . .

"Well? . . . Was it not for this that we went out to die in Eighteen, comrades?" he uttered in a dull voice. "I remember I dreamt of that city when I had the typhus. . . . I sat near a post in some steppe. . . . Rain. . . . Corpses on the ground. . . . And beyond the rain from among the wet grasses glimmered cupolas, wonderful arches,—recessed houses rose in the air. . . . Even now—let me close my eyes, and I see. . . . Ah! And we lose time, drink beer. . . ."

Without tasting of his glass, he lay down on a

bed, and closed his eyes. His earthen face moved convulsively. A debate arose. They told Buzheninov:

"You're in a fever, Vassya. . . . With such a fever you'll never accomplish anything. . . . To build a new life is not to write poetry. Here the iron laws of economics are at work. Here you have to re-educate a whole generation. And as for Utopian Socialism, why, they'll crush you under the wheels before you have time to open your mouth. . . . Hold your course to the World Revolution, and meanwhile let all your days be Mondays. It's harder to make something of these Mondays than to build your city. . . ."

To all these words of reason, Buzheninov, without opening his eyes, answered through his teeth:

"I know. . . . I know. . . ."

His friends stayed late, and departed with the dawn. On the morning of the sixteenth, Buzheninov left for home. His entire baggage consisted of a portfolio with sketches and a box with drawing materials.

Nadezhda Ivanovna

The letter which had excited Buzheninov was from his mother's ward, Nadiusha, Nadezhda Ivanovna. Sitting near a window in the train, he read it again.

"Dear Vassya: We found out not long ago that you are alive and that you are even studying in the School of Architecture. We were very glad, chiefly

because you are alive. For three years we did not hear from you. I am already twenty-two years old and work in the Lumber Trust. They returned our house last year, but we were forced to repair it. Now we have a cow, chickens, and even turkeys. You must send us seeds for the garden without fail. Mother feels badly, she is deaf and does not see anything. It is very hard to get along with her. She is always angry, nothing suits her. Lately she caught cold, and now she is in bed. You ought to come, or I am afraid that you will never see her. This Shrovetide, Utyovkin, our office manager, proposed to me, but I refused, because he is unreliable. I dream of going on the stage, but while mother lives it is impossible. Although Utyovkin repeats that I have talent, still I think that he is only trying to get into my graces. Oh, how I want life. Spring is in full bloom here. Your loving Nadya. . . ."

It was a strange letter. Like quince, and yet it seemed tasty, the mouth watered. Buzheninov looked out of the window, beyond the rising and falling wires, and saw flat lakes of spring water. The morning was foggy, the sun hung, an orange ball, above the floods. Brooks ran from lake to lake, pressing down last year's grass. In the distance trees and haystacks grew from the waters. On the islets wandered cattle, the wings of a mill turned, tattered by the winds.

Buzheninov walked out on the platform of the car, and blinking with deep delight, breathed in the smell of spring earth and spring waters. They were pass-

ing stations where the rooks cried, circling above their nests in the tall, still naked poplars. The rooks cried so anxiously that his heart began to hurt. He blinked again, smiling. It seemed terribly funny that Nadya was twenty-two years old. She had been a youngster—a nice face, blue eyes, silken chestnut hair in a braid with a bow. When she talked she would come near to you, trustfully, her thin arms hanging,—she looked straight into your eyes.

The train, slowing down, passed a railroad bridge. Deep underneath, through the swollen, muddy river an ancient vessel was moving on oars, full of cattle, wagons and peasant women. Apparently the vessel had been inherited by the muzhiks from the Vikings, and had been in use for nearly two thousand years, carrying the population along the current into the villages.

Buzheninov looked through the window at the Viking ship, at the lakes, at the rooks' nests, at the small herds of sheep, at the muddy, black roads, and the world seemed beautiful to him.

A man of extreme sensitiveness, he saw in the surroundings only what he wanted passionately to see. It was almost actual hallucination.

The County Seat

There is no necessity for us to tell in detail about the unpaved alleys, the rotten fences and the gates with benches for eating sunflower seeds, of the

houses patched with boards, on whose window-sills grow geraniums as a sign that "do what you will, citizens, but there is nothing in the constitution against geraniums." . . .

Everybody knows what a county seat on the bank of a river is: a market place soggy with manure, hay scales, booths, the sign of a co-operative over a brick store, a priest in deep galoshes, lifting the hem of his cassock, making his way into a side alley; a militiaman, or as the angry women in the market express themselves, a "bullfinch," standing around and looking about uncomprehendingly; the old orchard of the late chairman of the nobility, now the town park, with nests in the poplars and a cloud of rooks whose spring cries excite certain girls, and, well,—the firehouse tower. . . . And above the silence, above the poverty, the whistle of a train in the far distance.

Walking from the station, Vassili Alexeievich, the devil knows why, thought for a moment: "There's a dull life for you!" But his uplifted mood still continued.

The wooden house of his mother, with the four windows facing the street, had grown into the ground in these years, it leaned sideways, the paint had cracked. But behind the bubbled glass stood pots with geraniums and cactus plants. Vassili Alexeievich opened the gate,—the courtyard was clean. Spotted hens lay in the heat, a bare-legged rooster, who seemed to be very stupid, looked at the sun. Near the little barn an old woman in a

soldier's coat was hanging out kitchen towels. She bowed to Buzheninov silently. He ran up the rotting steps to the door, into the dark vestibule smelling of dampness and cabbage, found the familiar door,—the burlap hung on it in rags,—opened it, and in the opening of the door leading from the tiny vestibule with the little mat on its floor to the low dining-room where a canary cackled in a bourgeois strain, saw Nadya.

She wore an open sheepskin jacket, a short skirt and a white kerchief.

"What is it you wish, citizen?" she asked, drawing her brows together.

He called her by name,—and said nothing more, he was so excited. The curls peeping from under her kerchief began to tremble. Her brows came apart. Throwing her hands up, she approached Buzheninov, and at once something that was either amazement or pity flitted across her pretty face.

"Vassya, can it be you?" she asked quietly. He kissed her cool cheek. He leaned his portfolio and his box against the wall, unwound his scarf, unfastened the hooks of his coat—his fingers trembled.

"Mother is well?"

"Mother is sleeping right now."

"You are getting ready to go somewhere?"

"To work. We must give you tea. I'll tell Matryona."

Her blue eyes gleamed. She ran out. Buzheninov heard her voice in the courtyard, then she crossed

the street diagonally, choosing the drier places to step on, turned, wrinkling her nose at the sun, and her skirt whisked around a corner.

Vassili Alexeievich gathered breath and sat down near the window under the bird-cage, where the canary swished in the birdseed, singing the same song over and over again—having nothing else to do,—about how beautiful Nadya had become, not a youngster but a woman, about how troublesome Nadya's eyes were, and what curls she had on her temples, and how her skirt just whisked around that corner. The language of birds is dark, you can interpret it in any way you wish. Buzheninov gazed at the wasteland, the fences, the houses; he smoked, and sighed like a man sentenced to wait for an express train at an out-of-the-way junction. . . . He looked around the room—there under that hanging lamp he once learned to read and write. There is the yellowed photograph—he at seven years, Nadya—a little girl, and his mother in a hat and with an unusually angry face. There in a veil and mantle was the wrinkled grandmother, she who had quartered the matches. From the window to the battered chest-of-drawers, where Nadya kept her mirror, her powder box and a jar with the cold-cream "Metamorphosis," there were about five steps. That was funny. It had seemed there was more space at home. Under the windows—bottles into which rain water flowed along woolen strings. Yes, the technic was old here. One would have to

spend much energy that the azure city might rise above this squalor.

His mother snored lightly behind the wall. Then the old woman in the coat came in, bowed, said quietly: "Welcome, handsome little father." She covered the table, carried in the familiar, dented, but terribly active samovar. Vassili Alexeievich drank tea and smoked cigarettes. This entire little backwater world was wrapped in the magic song of the canary. Through the clouds of samovar steam she sang to Buzheninov of an untold future.

The Soles Touch Earth

Vassili Alexeievich was terribly young. And how else: when he was seventeen he had crawled into an armoured car which rushed down the Tverskaya to the Square of the Revolution. He fought three years. Then the Academy, the draughtsman's tables, the tomb in the Don Cemetery, living dreams of azure cities. He didn't have a penny-worth of life experience.

And suddenly the fantastic flow of time stopped. His soles touched the earth and stood on it. The courtyard gate grated, everyday voices talked tranquilly, there was the smell of manure. A century-old, ragged crow came from the motionless sky, sat down on the fence over against the window. "Caw, how do you do, Vassili Alexeievich, what think you to underrr-take?"

What could be undertaken here? To rise at

eleven o'clock and drink tea with warm cream. To sit a little near the deaf and blind mother who always wanted to know if he was a Bolshevik or not. Then to walk until dinner and sit near the river. At five to return, making the garden gate squeak. To wipe the feet on the burlap near the door. And to wait near the window for Nadya, trying not to show that he had been thinking of this moment of joy all day long. Now she walked past the window, scraped her boots on the burlap, and cried with ringing voice: "Matryona, get ready the dinner." Then she came in with the unchanging phrase: "Foo, how tired I am." Hung her jacket on a nail in the vestibule, smoothed her dress, put out her cool cheek for a kiss.

"How do you feel,—better?"

Matryona carries in an iron pot with cabbage soup. Nadya says:

"You eat, don't be bashful, you have to get better."

After dinner Nadya would disappear, either to a friend's, or to the movies, invited "by some one, you don't know him." Vassili Alexeievich would sit down on the couch under the photographs that were covered with fly-specks and gnaw his nails—it was hard to do anything else, for Nadya exercised great economy with the kerosene and begged that he should refrain from lighting the lamp till late. It was necessary to drop smoking for two reasons: for the sake of health (Nadya said on the first day that tobacco was harmful) and because of the com-

plete absence of money. The home was supported by Nadya's insignificant wages. She said: "We shall fall into despair if you, Vassya, will not begin to earn something and send it to me and mother." Vassili Alexeievich could not forget the grimace of wonderment and disappointment on Nadya's face at their first meeting.

"I must look rotten, of course; I am ill, my teeth are not in order," he would think in the twilight, "but is it this that is so important? . . . It would be pleasanter if a healthy brute had dropped in here, in strong boots, happy, with a pocket full of gold-pieces. . . . There would not have been any disappointment. . . . Ah, foolishness, details. . . . Until May I'll eat myself healthy, fix my teeth, and there, Nadezhda Ivanovna, is a picture for you. But—your youngsters from the movies will never build cities—their foreheads are too small."

Vassili Alexeievich tried several times to speak to Nadya about his work, about the rebuilding of Moscow according to the new plan, about the greatness of the problems thrown at humanity by the Russian Revolution. There was no doubt—Nadya would understand and value him, and all commonplace nothings,—the lack of money, too,—would seem insignificant.

Nadya did not try to escape these talks, but as soon as he became enthusiastic her face would grow care-worn. "Excuse me, Vassya, I forgot altogether. . . . I'll come back soon." And she would disappear, run out of the courtyard. . . . And

Buzheninov sits in the darkness again, and tries to bring his thoughts into order.

Once the rain helped him,—it came down in a flood. Nadya sighed at the window for a while, then lit the lamp and sat down to darn stockings. Her eyes were especially fine,—blue, calm, with soft eyebrows in a dark fringe. Vassili Alexeievich looked into them, looked, until his head began to turn.

"You are an architect, Vassya,—tell me," Nadya began, biting off a thread from the stocking which was stretched on a wooden spoon, "is it really true that abroad they have a bathroom in every house? Yesterday I saw it in the movies,—a wonderful picture. Asta Nilssen takes a bath every day. Is that true? It's tiresome." She shook her head and laughed quietly. "I once knew some one, you don't know him, an ex-war prisoner, and he told me that in private apartments abroad all the beds are under canopies. You build such a house in Moscow. You'll become famous. Although somehow I don't believe it. I know life from the movies. Of course the actors in the movies try to show themselves at their best, but in reality they are just the same as plain people."

"Nadya," asked Buzheninov from the darkness of the couch, "tell me openly, it is very important . . . understand,—you love somebody?"

Nadya raised her brows. The darning needle stopped. Nadya sighed, and the thread moved again.

"This is what I will tell you, Vassya. . . . What is love? To live. . . . Oh-ho-ho! . . . You think a girl marries because she is in love? That is so only in the movies. What has love to do with it? You meet a man by accident, and take a look: if he can better your condition with something, you take him. . . . There was a man from Minsk that wanted me. And I wanted to go to Minsk all at once,—it's a capital city, after all. They say there are stores,—three-story houses on the main street. . . . I almost consented. Well, it came out later that he was only a tramp, and not from any Minsk at all."

"No, Nadya, no, you are odd and strange. I know you better. . . . You can't speak this way. This is only something you heard. . . . In reality life is beautiful, enticing. You must build, struggle, love. . . ."

Buzheninov spoke until a late hour, while there was still kerosene in the lamp. Nadya listened, bit off the threads, and lowered her head, smiling. The beauty of the young girl intoxicated Vassili Alexeievich like the air of springtime. He fell asleep without undressing, on the couch,—fell like a stone into sweet darkness. And in the morning—he looked out of the window—there sat the crow again. The selfsame fence. Grey skies. A rusty pail lying in the roadway. Nothing had changed during the night. And of yestereve's words remained only vexation and perplexity.

Customs, Habits, and So On

The little things in life which were not worth attention in themselves began to take on sickly proportions in the consciousness of Vassili Alexeievich. This is why we ask you to run through these lines. They will explain a great deal.

The town became interested in Buzheninov. Various rumours began to run the rounds. The office manager, Utyovkin, it was said, even grew pale when he heard of Buzheninov's arrival, and said with heavy insinuation:

"Ah, so. . . . Well, now I understand everything."

When the round-shouldered figure of Vassili Alexeievich appeared during the day on Karl Marx Street, which led to the market place, the passers-by looked with tremendous curiosity at the "academist." Even the militiaman smiled kindly at him.

Once the storekeeper Pikus, standing near the door of his shop, tipped his hat and invited him in, querying in a counter-revolutionary whisper:

"Tell me, what's going on in Moscow? How about the Nep? They say there is no hope. This is a terrible time. We are rolling into an abyss. I have reached such a nervous state that I howl in my sleep. I am very glad to make your acquaintance. And Nadezhda Ivanovna really waited too long."

Pikus only hinted at what was openly said in town. The provinces do not like anything that cannot be understood and that causes restlessness to

the imagination. Actually, why the devil should Buzheninov have come to this backwater? The matter was clear—he came to marry. But here there appeared all sorts of hidden half-truths. Buzheninov came to a place that was not entirely free—at least that is how they ironised.

His acquaintance was made in Pikus' store by Sashok, a ruddy young man in a long coat and a plush cap, the son of a wholesale wheat dealer, Zhigalev. He began to ask questions about the capital, the lectures and cabarets, the women on the Kuznetsky Most, and led Vassili Alexeievich into the beer parlour "Renaissance" on a second floor, overlooking the square.

Treating him to cigarettes, Sashok wrinkled the eyelids of his brown eyes with laughter,—he was fleshy, sanguine, his eyebrows grew together.

"By the way, Nadezhda Ivanovna is a regular girl. Only she holds her head too high. In our time we shouldn't think too much of ourselves. Yes, Vassili Alexeievich. New birds, new songs, as they say. Of course, with her face—in Moscow, on the stage, a stenographer in a large trust,—it is possible to make a career. But here . . ."

Moving his brows, Sashok threw a wet pea into his mouth, gripped it between his strong teeth, and laughed. . . .

"Yes, here it is not practical from any point of view. The best is to marry—the husband has eight gold pieces a month, she herself, three and a half

. . . Colourless . . . Or she might go into the Komsomol. Well . . .”

Through his thick eyelashes the pupils of his eyes glittered slyly at Buzheninov.

“That I can understand. Otherwise it is neither here nor there. By the way, I’m getting ready to go to England on daddy’s business. I asked Nadezhda Ivanovna, as a joke, to come along as my companion, something like a secretary. She is afraid of what people will say. One in our midst to be afraid of public opinion! That’s a good joke.”

Vassili Alexeievich looked wildly at his companion—what was he about? Really, such words deserved instant punishment. But Sashok, without stopping to think, had leaped to another idea, and was pouring forth eloquent phrases.

“But one thing I will tell you, as an intelligent man, be careful of Utyovkin. That scoundrel is ready to do anything. After Nadezhda Ivanovna refused him, he ran to the Economic Section and the GPU. Well, of course you know it was foolish. He made no sexual impression on her and so he ran to tell stories about the girl. It is good that he was sent to the devil by them. Do you know what he said about you when you had just arrived? ‘Buzheninov,’ he said, ‘has been sent here by administrative order for some dark affair, but the question is how long he will stay here as a parasite.’ . . . A regular editorial, and not a man, this Utyovkin. . . . By the way, joking aside,—do you intend to stay here long?”

"I don't know. I must cure myself. I need rest."

"Some venereal disease, of course, I suppose."

"A nervous breakdown," Buzheninov answered angrily, and tapped his nails on the tin tray.

"So that's what's the matter, he-he," said Sashok, and walked energetically to the lavatory.

Buzheninov wanted to go away, but the beer had made him heavy, and he remained sitting, his head lowered gloomily. The door of the beer parlour opened every minute now. It was a market day. Peasants came in, buyers, storekeepers, townspeople who had made their small bargains. Around the tables ran business talk, low and poor as the grey sky above the square, above the burlap tents, above the unharnessed wagons, above the rooks' nests in the bare branches. The smoke of strong tobacco trembled in layers through the long room of the "Renaissance." Boots had covered the plank floor with manure from the square. It seemed to Vassili Alexeievich that he sat at the bottom of the deepest well, and only the garish posters of the Dobrolyot, the Dobrokhim, the red silhouette of a workman amidst red chimneys on the plastered wall above the heads of the tea drinkers and tobacco inhalers reminded him of distant, faraway Moscow where life thundered on its way through the streets.

Sashok returned from the lavatory, and said, nodding towards the bar:

"For the sake of that little lady over there somebody's legs were broken here, and about twenty

cases were heard before the People's Court. A celebrity."

Behind the bar idly stood a full-breasted little "lady" in a striped muslin dress, round-faced, powdered, with a little nose, with combs in her tightly curled hair.

A man in black trousers and a civilian coat, his elbow heavy on the bar, was talking to her. His long nose had just run into a plate of roast liver and sniffed at a pot of herrings.

"I suppose I'll eat it," said this man and looked oilily at the little "lady" behind the bar. "Give me a little liver, and give me half a herring. Which half? Whichever you wish—either from the tail or from the head."

He sat down at a table, crossed his legs, bit a cigarette down with one of his fangs, and half closed one of his eyes from the smoke.

The little "lady" carelessly placed before him the plates with the liver and the herring, and turned away indifferently. But he invited her:

"Sit down at my table, Raisa Pavlovna. You won't bother me. Perhaps just the opposite."

Instead of answering she protruded her lower lip, and began to primp at her combs.

"Yesterday I sat through three shows at the movies looking at 'Be Still, Grief, Be Still,' and you did not deign to appear. I was hurt."

The fateful little "lady" shrugged her shoulders, and went behind the bar. The man turned his long,

wavy nose towards her, and dragging a herring bone out of his teeth, said ironically:

"Well, confess that I did embarrass you a little."

"How did you embarrass me? Stop your fooling!"

Sashok said to Buzheninov:

"That is Utyovkin. A Lovelace and our best foxtrotter. He thinks you'll tell about his goings-on. And Nadezhda Ivanovna and this Raisa are the worst of enemies; they couldn't divide an aviator between them last year."

Two strangers, in jackets splashed with mud, approached Sashok, and the three of them sat down at a neighbouring table to talk of wheat. Buzheninov walked out of the beer parlour.

The wind on the square shook the strings of dry doughnuts and salt fish in the burlap booths, and lifted the ear of a little dog sitting on a hay-wagon. A shote squealed as a peasant dragged him by the leg out of a sack. There was a strong odour of salt pork, tar and manure. On the dry sidewalk, near a pile of bath brooms, sat a tremendous woman in a stuffed cotton skirt, and turning her bare back to the square, searched for fleas in her shirt. A grey-haired man in an old officer's coat with bone buttons, stopped, looked at the woman's bare back, and asked lifelessly:

"How much is a broom?"

"Two billions," the woman answered angrily.

An old Jew, shaking his head, silently dragged a gosling's neck from under the armpit of a muzhik

with terrible eyes. The gosling was pitiable, with a broken bill. The Jew grievously examined his webs and wings, blew in his bill, and offered his price. The muzhik wanted more.

"This is a goose. Feed him, and he'll be all fat."

And dragged the gosling by the neck towards himself.

"He can't even eat, his nose is broken off. What do I need a goose like that for?" the Jew answered, and dragged the gosling back towards himself.

"Your nose is broken off," the muzhik shouted in a deep-seated voice. "You look how he eats," and he shoved bread at the gosling; the gosling choked.

Near a wagon with clay pots two women began to yell and quarrel. The militiaman with the stony face walked towards them unhurriedly, and the women grew silent, glaring at the redcap like two rats.

"What's the trouble, citizens? Come to the station."

A venerable old man in eyeglasses, a dealer in green-faced lions, made of *papier-mâché*, and painted whistles, read a book without paying any attention to the noise and movement about him. Before his stall stood a drunkard, with dirty felt boots thrown across his shoulders, boots which he had apparently brought for sale, and repeated threateningly:

"Objects of luxury are not permitted. We'll tell about this to the proper party."

Vassili Alexeievich rounded the market place by

way of the sidewalk, passed the park where the rooks cried tirelessly above their nests from dawn to night and where a flock of boys played ball on a green-
ing field, and walked out to the cliff above the river.

Here he sat down on a bench and looked at the current, at the thin lines of the woods in the distance. Birds flew from there into the darkening sky. A mist rose above the wide valley, above the lakes, above the half drowned villages.

Sticking his hands between his knees, pressing his lips together, Vassili Alexeievich thought:

"Centuries of sadness, poverty, greyness. The beer parlour with the little 'lady', Utyovkin, Sashka. . . . Rotten talk. . . . They have all found their places, they all fit in. . . . Utyovkin and the fox trot. . . . They live. They live. . . . Why? . . . Can it be that a new, a great, a beautiful race will ever grow here? . . ."

Just then, another man sat down beside Vassili Alexeievich. He took off his eyeglasses, wiped them, blew his nose.

"You and I have known each other, Comrade Buzheninov," he said in a friendly manner.

The Testimony of Comrade Khotyaintsev

During the conduct of the investigation Comrade Khotyaintsev told of his meeting with Buzheninov on the cliff at twilight. (Khotyaintsev had passed through the town on official business.) His testimony was as follows:

Investigator: When did you know Buzheninov?

Khotyaintsev: In the year Twenty-one. I was the Political Director of the division.

Investigator: Did you notice any peculiarities in him, any fits of anger—in a word, anything out of the ordinary?

Khotyaintsev: No. His conduct was always good. At one time he worked in the regimental club. The Comrades always had a warm word for him.

Investigator: At the time of your meeting on the cliff you also noticed nothing extraordinary?

Khotyaintsev: It seemed to me that he was gloomy and excited. We argued.

Investigator: Was his mood of a personal character, or was the reason for his excitement more general, for instance, social dissatisfaction?

Khotyaintsev: I think it was both. He was depressed by his illness and the impossibility of continuing his studies and his work in the near future. Besides, there were reasons of a general character. I was astounded when I heard a sharp and irreconcilable opinion from him about the surroundings into which he had fallen. He began the conversation something like this:

“Do you remember, Comrade Khotyaintsev, the work in the clubs, the talks, the performances, the concerts? What fine fellows they were! How they all burned! That was a happy time, never to be forgotten.”

We began to reminisce about our comrades, about the war. We were enthusiastic. He turned away,

and it seemed to me, wiped his eyes with his sleeve. "I have fallen from my horse into the mud of the roadway, the regiment has gone, and I sit in the mud. This is how it seems to me," he said with great bitterness. "In one day to-day I've glutted enough rot for a year, so that I don't want to live. Townspeople. Grey life. All they do is eat polly-seeds behind their gates. Yes, yes, Comrade Khot-yaintsev, the hoofs of our horses beat no longer. The happy years have fled. Happy are they who rot in the ground."

I remember that I laughed at him then. "Perhaps," I said, "Comrade Buzheninov, you have started to write poetry? You sound very heart-broken."

Then he said with even greater strength:

"An explosion is necessary,—all-destroying. . . . A fiery broom to sweep all the dirt away. Then I was against the capitalists and the landowners, and now I am against Utyovkin. . . . I'll tell you," he said, "how Utyovkin ate liver to-day." And he began to imitate an acquaintance of his.

I began to see that he was actually serious. "Your moods," I said, "Comrade Buzheninov, come under an old category of ours. They are not new. It is not worth while to reason that way. When you are in the saddle, rifle in hand, and fire beyond the nearest mound—that hour of the Revolution is lived on nerves, on emotions, on enthusiasm. Gallop, cut, shout with full voice, be romantic. The roan horse rears up and carries you away. But now harness

that battle steed to the plow,—that's hard, there's no flight there,—just everyday labour and sweat. Nevertheless that is the flesh of the Revolution, its body. The explosion is only the head. The Revolution is a complete cycle of being. From the taking of the Winter Palace to thirty-two kopeks for a yard of muslin. You just imagine what terrific sweep, what pathos there must be in it to force a war-scarred veteran with four decorations of the Red Flag to sell doughnuts on the marketplace where your Utyovkin ate his liver. In the end of things there is more courage needed to sell those doughnuts than to rush with naked blade into the attack. You won't sweep out the townspeople with a broom, make it of fire or of iron. They eat their way in. You must do it with muslin and books, and the theatre and the club and the tractor. You must re-educate the generations. And many tormenting years will pass before the light will break into your Utyovkin's head. For you poets,—if you wish, I will agree,—our time is tragic. . . ."

I tried to speak to him in his own language. He was silent, sighed, and I thought that I had persuaded him. Anyway, in parting, he said:

"Thanks. If I have enough health, manhood, and strength, I'll try to fight on the peace front. You are right, it is a tragedy: I can't enter into everyday life and become part of it, nor can I remain an individual and stick it out all by myself."

Beyond the River

The mud and rains were over. Came the sunny May days, across the skies swam snowy mountains with bluish chasms. In the town it was dusty in the alleys, and the fences began to smell bad. But beyond the river it was very fine—green.

During these few weeks Vassili Alexeievich gained weight and became stronger, his shoulders straightened. He felt much more rested, not as before when the ends of his nerves grew white-hot over the smallest nothing. It seemed that in a little while his former health would return.

It was only the lack of money that was hard to bear. Although Nadya did not even drop a hint, still it was felt that a parasite was in the house. Give him cabbage soup every day, and bread and milk and sugar. Even Matryona once yelled about the “parasite” across the fence to a neighbour.

That spring Nadya could have bought herself muslin for a waist, but she did not buy it. The waist was eaten up by Vassili Alexeievich. It was impossible to get work in the town, all the offices were filled, there was talk of laying workers off. The only reasonable thing to do was not to lose time and to prepare the necessary work for the autumn. With some apprehension, Vassili Alexeievich began to work. Nadya even praised him.

“I have told them in the office already that you have begun to draw,—they were laughing at you, all of them.”

Vassili Alexeievich rose at dawn now. Matryona helped him with the pitcher to wash himself in the courtyard. "You'd better drink a little warm milk. I won't tell anybody." He would sit down to the table over his sketches, scratching one bare foot, which the flies were tickling, with the other. When Nadya would wake up behind the wall, he would suddenly be all ears. Turning his head, with open mouth, gripping his pencil, he would look at the wall. And he would catch himself at it: "Foo, how foolish, and how out of place." When Nadya would come into the dining-room, washed, fresh, in curls, his blood would begin to beat and leap in his veins like the rosy liquid they sold in glass retorts at the fairs.

He would show her the project of a railroad station. Nadya would nod her head.

"Good; I like it, Vassya. But it isn't very practical. I like little houses with fences. A swing, a gnome on the lawn. Mignonette, sweet peas. That is my dream. . . ."

Vassili Alexeievich did not argue, he smiled. He decided at last "to open her eyes." She must see the Azure City. It was foolish to talk about it. It was necessary to show it. She would understand. It was not for nothing that they had fed the "parasite" four weeks.

Vassili Alexeievich took a piece of canvas from his mother's trunk, put a ground on it, and carefully, unhurriedly began to work in the hours when Nadya was at the office. He would close his eyes,

and in his imagination opened a vista of recessed houses, of the flowery carpets of the streets, of glass cupolas, of bridges—like rainbows over a city of happy humanity.

When his head was too hot from work and his hands trembled, he would hide the canvas under the couch, take his cap and go beyond the river, not noticing the dust, the rotten fences, the kindly, bowing Pikus at the door of his store. On the other side of the river he would pace for a while in the wet grass of the lowland, and then lie down on a green mound, his hands crossed under his head.

The azure light of the sky poured into his eyes, the sun baked his cheeks, a bee was busy with a flower. The wind would fly near, noisy in the aspens, gathering the sharpish odour of grasses, honey and dampness from the earth. His eyes would close, a soft shock would felicitously sway his body, and he would sleep. . . .

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. . . Down like a night bird slipped an aeroplane, and a woman's voice cried from it: "I wait. Come." . . . The "I wait" rang through the air. . . . At last. . . . And he walks the broad, shining stairs of the recessed house,—up, down, past the mirrorlike windows. Behind them—the night, cut through by the bluish rays of projectors. The round roofs glimmer with light from inside. . . . Lights, lights. . . . Again—steps downward. He runs—he loses his breath. A measureless hall, a

pool in the centre. Thousands of youths and girls swim, dive. . . . Teeth gleam, eyes, rosy arms. . . . He leans over the marble edge, he seeks, he looks deep,—where is she, she who called him? . . . That dear, dear face. . . . And he feels—blue eyes, here, somewhere behind, somewhere to the side. . . .

Vassili Alexeievich would lift himself, sit up on the mound, look wildly at the meadows, at the spring flood, at the aspens playing with the wind, at the grey little town on the other side of the river. And his face in these moments of awakening must have been lighted by fantastic fires.

Small Events

In the twilight Vassili Alexeievich passed the Alley of Marat. Through a crack in the fence somebody shouted at him in a terrible voice:

“We’ll fix you all right!”

There was the tramp of feet running over the wasteland.

When he came home, Nadya sat near the table blowing her nose into a rolled-up handkerchief, wiping her eyes. She turned angrily away from Vassili Alexeievich. He sat down on the couch. She began to speak.

“Can’t you understand that you are compromising me? . . . God knows what they are saying in town. To-day that rotter Raisa tells me with a nasty look—‘You’ve grown stout, darling.’ Utyov-

kin is behaving like a scoundrel, he almost doesn't notice me. I wish I were dead. . . . All thanks to you!"

Her lips were swollen, her hair hung over her eyes. Vassili Alexeievich, shocked, said quietly:

"Nadya, I don't understand."

She turned and looked at him with her reddened eyes in such a way that he immediately lowered his head.

"I knew beforehand that you would answer, 'I don't understand.' What don't you understand? You walk around town like a lunatic. On the market place everybody knows—there goes the bridegroom. They just about roll with laughter. . . . The bridegroom! . . ."

"Nadya, I thought that it would come of itself. . . ."

"What? . . . Marry you? . . . It wouldn't hurt you if you really tried to get well. . . ."

Nadya pushed away the plate with the uneaten food, went into her room and lay down. Vassili Alexeievich's head was filled with such chaos that he had to sit on the stoop. His head was in the grip of a leaden hoop, and he grew to the steps, unable to decide to rush to Nadya, awaken her, to tell the sleeping girl: "Nadya, I love you. Nadya, I am suffering. Nadya, have pity, I want you. . . . I am lost." In the darkness the dog Sharik approached him, smelled his knee, and suddenly, scratching the ground with her paws, turned into a ball and her old teeth cracked fleas on her hind-

quarters. Beyond the low roofs, beyond the starlings' nests, still spread the dead orange light of sunset. The sky was impenetrable. Leaves rustled in the neighbours' orchard behind the fence. Of course, Vassili Alexeievich did not decide upon anything, nor did he understand what had happened that night.

On the morrow he waited for a continuation of the conversation. But the day passed as usual—hot, full of flies. The wind chased the dust up the alley. Nadya appeared at dinner hurriedly, ate something, did not lift her eyes even once, and ran away.

To suffer, to wait for her, was unbearable. And for the first time Vassili Alexeievich was stung by doubt—as if a needle had been plunged into his brain cells—where was it that Nadya went every evening?

He leapt into the courtyard, lowered his forehead, and stumbled against Matryona, who was splitting wood.

"Where has Nadya gone?"

"My dear, I don't know. Perhaps to the Maslovs. She always goes there."

"Who are they?"

"The Maslovs? Storekeepers. Once they were rich, and even now they have a thing or two. Run over, it isn't far."

The orchards that had once belonged to the Maslovs stretched three miles along the river. Now only a workers' section was left, surrounded by a

new fence, and in places by barbed wire along which ran locust bushes. Near these locusts Vassili Alexeievich stopped. He gripped his belt with his hands, and looked into the dust.

He had come here in two jumps: first into the courtyard to Matryona, then to the locusts. There had been nothing in between. "I will go in, and if she is there, I will say that . . ." Just then there was laughter behind the locusts. He bent down, and between the tree trunks he saw Nadya and a stout, red-cheeked girl. They lay in the meadow on a blanket and muslin pillows. Before them stood a short, middle-aged woman holding a dress in her hands—a seamstress, it seemed. Her large lips were stretched and smiled kindly and foolishly. The red-cheeked girl, curled up among the pillows, was saying:

"Oh, I can just burst! Then why, Yevdokia Ivanovna, didn't you marry?"

"Porphyri Semyonich begged me a terrible number of times; he wept: Yevdokia Ivanovna, change your decision. But, said I, Porphyri Semyonich, how shall I marry when I can't bear tickling?"

"Oh, I simply can't. . . . Well, and he?"

"Well, what could he do? I wouldn't give in. Well, and from grief he started courting Nastasia Churkina. Nastasia was glad, oh, very glad,—she prepared her dowry, and had a bridal dress made. Then—the wedding. But on the eve of the wedding Porphyri Semyonich appears drunk before his

bride, and spoils her bridal dress. 'I,' says he, 'can't forget my first love.' " . . .

The seamstress amused them for a while, and left. The girls lay on their pillows, weak with laughter and heat. A gust of the hot evening wind carried a cloud of dust above the orchard. Red-cheeked Zoya Maslova lifted herself, and primping her hair, her arms bare to the shoulders, said:

"Why doesn't he come, the unhappy fool?"

She lay down again, and embraced Nadya's waist. "Chickadee, kitten, don't pay any attention. Spit at it, let their tongues scratch if they are not too lazy. Live, my rabbit, as your young heart tells you to. Live as hard as you can—while you can live."

She laughed and bit Nadya's neck playfully.

"You'll get old, and it will be too late, my cuckoobird."

After a silence, turning a grassblade in her hand, Nadya answered:

"It's all right for you with your money. But I have to feed that old woman and that innocent. I hoped, I wrote to him, that he would help, that he would lighten my load. . . . A terrible disappointment, Zoya. And besides, imagine, he is in love with me."

Zoya threw up her hands. Nadya continued in a subdued voice:

"I have decided, that if I give myself to a man, it will be in legal marriage, so that he may improve

my circumstances. Then perhaps I will go to Moscow, to a dramatic school."

"It's true, then," Zoya cried warmly, "that your brains are all in a whirl. Find yourself a rich fool at once, and marry. I have told you a hundred times that Sashka can't marry because his father won't let him. And so you'll sit your whole life like a crow in an alley. . . ."

Zoya suddenly turned and pushed Nadya. Sashok, in an embroidered shirt, striped pants, and yellow halfshoes, was approaching them. He had a guitar under his arm. He removed his boxed cap—in the fashion of the Moscow Komsomol—dropped on the grass beside the girls and shook their hands.

"Dreaming, citizens?"

"Anyway, we dream least of you," Zoya answered energetically, closing her eyes with laughter.

Nadya fixed her skirt over her legs; her lower teeth protruded slightly. Sashok took a look at the sky where another cloud of dust passed.

"Hottish, citizens. What this temperature will lead a young fellow to—one can simply go crazy. . . ."

"Lead to what, for example?" asked Zoya.

Sashok nodded at Nadya, winked, touched the strings of his guitar, and began to hum somewhat hoarsely:

"I love the odour of crushed satin

That makes me lose my heart and mind. . . ."

Between the verses sung to the air of "Allah Verdy," Sashok jested, and passed clever remarks,

looking sharply at Nadya. When they got tired of the music, all three picked up the blanket and the pillows and went to drink tea.

Vassili Alexeievich, sitting near the locusts, swallowed all their poisonous talk in one breath. Smiling crookedly, he wandered to the river, and sat down on the clayey cliff.

What happened? Nothing happened. As in the first days after his arrival he saw and heard the little things of life with terrifying sharpness. To-day there was nothing new. Yet, no; those protruding teeth, that tilted head, the bare shoulder that peeped as if by accident from beneath the muslin. . . . That was new. . . . And the "innocent" was new. . . .

Khotyaintsev had said: "There is more manhood in selling doughnuts than in rushing with naked blade into the attack. . . ." Manhood was necessary, composure, will. And for the sensitive—death. Foolishness—two girls and an idiot with a guitar had said a lot of foolish things, and it was enough to bring down gloom on his soul, and a leaden hoop on his head. A fine builder! Foolishness, foolishness. From to-morrow on—twenty hours of work each day, and in two weeks—Moscow. . . .

But if a chance passer-by had looked at Vassili Alexeievich, he would have seen a round-shouldered young man in a colourless shirt, with long, uncombed hair. . . . The sunken cheeks, the sharpened nose, the unhappy face, would have shown that this

young man, full of contradictions, if confronted with one more crucial problem, would fly off the cliff into the river. . . .

But this did not happen. When the sunset faded beyond the dull fields, and campfires sprang up here and there in the valley, Vassili Alexeievich went home. In the Alley of Marat a stone whistled past his nose, and again some one's footsteps drummed thievishly across the wasteland.

Hot Days

"There aren't enough wishers to wish for everything," Nadya would say. She had a great deal of common sense. But the days became hotter and hotter, and at night even the sheets seemed to burn. And willy-nilly, Nadya would find herself each day in the Maslovs' orchard on the pillows under the apple tree. Common sense was all right in itself, but the hot evening, the dry sawing of the grasshoppers in the mowed grass, the blooming locusts and the bees, the lounging in the satin kimono (a present from Zoya), and the impudent Sashka—all this just seemed to come along of itself.

Zoya whispered slyly of her own "unnaturally passionate love affair with the young married doctor." Nadya thought at times: "The whirlpool of the July days is sucking me in." And yet it did not seem terrible.

The townspeople had not remembered such heat at the end of June for a long time. The leaves be-

gan to fade. Fog hung above the fields beyond the river. It was said that the wheat was burning. The walls crackled at night from dryness. In the offices the employ  s drank water, all of them as lifeless as stewed meat.

Buzheninov was finishing his work for the Academy. From dawn to twilight he sketched, drew, painted, studied in the overheated room filled with the buzz of flies. All that supported him was his unbelievable tension. The canvas with the plan of the Azure City he nailed to the wall, and worked over it in his minutes of rest. With each new day the city seemed to him to grow more perfect and more beautiful.

He had decided to go to Moscow the following week. His mother, it seems, found three golden ten-ruble pieces for his way there. "Take it, Vassya, I was saving it for my funeral, but they will bury me somehow. . . . Only don't tell Nadya." And he would have gone away, thin as a stick, enthusiastic, in the fever of imagination and work, if it had not been for an unexpected shock. His sudden tension broke out in another direction.

Life, it is very possible, does not excuse those who escape from it—the fantasts, the dreamers, the enthusiasts. It grips them and digs them vulgarly in the ribs: "You've dreamed enough, rip open your eyes, you've flown too high. . . ."

To call this the wisdom of life is terrible. The law, rather. Physiology. Life, like a raw, evil woman, does not like to be looked at from above.

Wisdom consists in mastering her, in putting her in the proper place—so, anyway, Comrade Khotyaintsev had explained on the cliff at twilight.

This is what happened. At half-past eight, before going to work, Nadya, with a portfolio and in a white kerchief, had looked as usual into the dining-room where Buzheninov was leaning over the table, and her eyes slipped indifferently over the Azure City which occupied half the wall. She walked out silently. The garden gate grated, and this was at once followed by a low, sickly cry from Nadya. She ran back through the vestibule, tore open the door, and threw herself, head and shoulders, on the table among the sketches.

"Scoundrel, scoundrel!" she cried, stamping her feet and weeping aloud. In the courtyard Matryona was cursing with full voice: "Ah, the scoundrels, ah, the bandits!"

"Leave us, do you hear, leave us this very minute!" Nadya repeated through her tears.

It seems that the gate was smeared in three places with tar, and a vulgar word was written in yard-high letters on it, also in tar. Matryona had already opened the two halves of the gate into the courtyard, and was removing the tar with lye water. Nadya did not go to work. She locked herself in. The hands of Vassili Alexeievich shook so that his pencil dropped. He tried to knock at Nadya's door.

"Get out. You alone are responsible for my dishonour," Nadya cried even more angrily. "Go

back to your Moscow, you innocent, you parasite. . . ."

His hands shook more and more. In his breast he felt the uneven, trembling beat of his pulse. Vassili Alexeievich stood for some time in the room,—the flies were creeping on his face. Then it somehow happened that he found himself on the square. (Another piece missing from his consciousness.) The white sun burned in the hot mist above him. A pillar of dust rose on the square and circled over the dry manure. Vassili Alexeievich gazed at the windows of the "Renaissance." Some visitors were already drinking beer there. And now a long, wavy nose appeared in the window from behind the wall. Buzheninov was being watched.

He clamped his teeth together, and ran up the stairway into the beer parlour. But the wavy nose had disappeared. The blooming, powdered Raisa looked from behind the bar with terrific curiosity, and her little mouth, like a thread across her face, smiled meaningfully. Buzheninov gripped the bar, and asked (at the investigation Raisa testified: "He roared at me, rolling his eyes"):

"Has Utyovkin been here?"

How did she know, Raisa answered, there were plenty of customers.

"You lie! It was he, I know. . . ."

"Citizen, don't yell like that."

But Buzheninov was already on the square under the foggy, white-hot sun. He looked about him. Only a few sleepy hens wandered in the hot dust.

Raisa saw him raise his fists to his temples, press his head tightly, and make for the river.

Towards evening he was seen in the meadows, sitting on a mound. He stayed there all night.

From the Examination of Nadezhda Ivanovna

Investigator: Why was Buzheninov certain that the gates had been smeared by Utyovkin, and that it was also he who threw the stone in the Alley of Marat?

Nadya: I don't know.

Investigator: And are you certain that it was Utyovkin who did it?

Nadya: Who else but he? Of course, it was he.

Investigator: What was his purpose? Perhaps Utyovkin was jealous of you?

Nadya: Partly that, too. Yes, he was jealous.

Investigator: What causes did he have to be jealous of you and Buzheninov in particular?

Nadya: They laughed at him. Alexandr Ivanovich (Zhigalev) said that he met Utyovkin and laughed at him, and that Utyovkin was made a fool of. . . . I became angry at that time, but Zhigalev quieted me and said it was only a joke. . . .

Investigator: In accosting Utyovkin, Zhigalev had Buzheninov in view, and not himself, of course?

Nadya: Yes.

Investigator: Does this mean that Utyovkin was certain that you were living with Buzheninov?

Nadya: I did not live with anybody.

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Investigator: Your former testimony was somewhat different.

Nadya: I don't know anything. . . . I don't remember. . . . It is all mixed up. . . .

Investigator: Did Buzheninov have a habit of carrying matches on himself?

Nadya: No, he did not smoke.

Investigator: Can't you show how matches suddenly appeared in Buzheninov's possession on the third of July?

Nadya: When he started to run, he snatched them from the sideboard.

Investigator: You saw it, and you remember how he snatched the matches? This is a very important point in the testimony.

Nadya: Yes, yes, I remember. . . . On the day after they smeared our gates, I felt very bad, and I went to the Maslovs. On the way I met him. . . . His eyes were white with anger. He looked terrible. He approached me. "Where are you going?" "None of your business, I am going to a friend." Then he: "I will pay them for this. I will burn the town up." And he shook his fist. So that when he snatched the matches, I remembered his threats.

Investigator: Where did he go after that?

Nadya: Home. Matryona gave him cabbage soup. She said that he ate two spoonfuls, and then either sank into thought or slept at the table. Then he went to my room, looked at my photograph, and even lay down on the bed, but got up at once and went away.

Investigator: Was that on the eve of the murder?

Nayda: Yes.

Investigator: Then you saw him when he ran in, showing his bloody hands, and it was then he snatched the matches?

Nadya: No, not at once. . . . I forgot. . . .

The Murder of Utyovkin

His tense mood, the strain of his work, his preparations for Moscow,—all this turned out to be pure deception.

All his meagre body, all his thoughts, thirsted for Nadya. Buzheninov would wake at dawn with hidden overwhelming joy. All day while at work this joy seethed in him, and it was so great, so intoxicating that even the discussion he had overheard in the orchard of the Maslovs sank like a mote of dust in it. Mere details,—well, if she did not love him she would. . . . Nadya,—who had not lived yet, who was still innocent,—it was not her time yet.

Over all these fantasies they smeared the vulgar word. He did not comprehend at once the whole monstrous meaning of the tar on the gates. At night, in the meadows, on the mowed mound, his head sunk to his knees,—he looked with closed eyes at the caravan of the days of his life. There arose in him a sense of hurt, of anger, of revenge.

In the morning, returning from the meadows, he saw Nadya near the Maslovs' orchard. She seemed

tiny to him, piercingly pitiable,—love,—blue eyes. He took her roughly by the hand and growled that he would avenge her. She did not understand, she grew frightened.

At home, in front of a plate of cabbage soup, he thought of revenge. His thoughts were confused, too much had been thought through the night. He went in to his mother, but she was snoring wearily in the suffocating heat of the room with the curtained window. Then, like a thief, he stole into Nadya's room, snatched her photograph from the dresser, and everything in him was shaken. He even lay down for a minute, but jumped up at once and walked out of the house. With a military gesture he tightened his belt. Now he was calm. The task was set—his thoughts worked as if along rails: exactly, clearly.

In the Alley of Marat he climbed over the fence and walked along the wasteland, which was overgrown with high pig weed between holes and piles of garbage. He crossed a hardly noticeable path in the grass, said: "Aha," and turned up the path to the ruins of a brick barn.

It was already dark. The moon had not yet appeared. Buzheninov circled the ruins and about fifty paces away saw two lighted windows of a small wooden house which backed into the wasteland. The light fell on a heap of rubbish, rusty iron and broken dishes. Buzheninov passed the heap and saw Utyovkin in the window, rolling his cigarettes—it seemed that he was hurrying somewhere. He was

in cap with a civilian band around it, without a cockade, with a canvas top. His lips, used in licking the cigarettes, smiled under the big, wavy nose,—a self-satisfied grin ran from one corner of the mouth to the other.

Utyovkin cleverly twisted the ends of the rolled cigarettes, put the cigarettes in a case, lighted the last one at the lamp, straightened his cap, picked up a cane from the table, swung it, and blew into the lamp chimney.

Buzheninov leaped away from the darkened windows and threw himself behind a corner of the house. The fence was taller than a man. . . . He rushed to the right—another fence. . . . Behind him sounded the energetic steps of Utyovkin.

Later, at the investigation, Buzheninov made extraordinary efforts to recall all the details of this night. He broke off in his testimony, grew amazed and extremely excited at the investigator's simple question: "What facts did you have to make you believe that it was Utyovkin who had smeared the gates? Only your certainty?"

"If you had seen yourself how he rolled his cigarettes, and smiled. . . . Of course it was he. . . . No, you won't mix me up, Comrade Investigator. . . . To fight three years and then to see how Utyovkin stands in his little cap. . . . No, no. . . . What facts do you want? . . . All through the Civil War he sat on his wasteland, and now he smears gates and rolls his cigarettes. . . . Not only had I become certain that it was he, but I saw how

nastily he chuckled when he smeared the gates. . . . I ran along the fence, climbed to the other side. I no longer saw Utyovkin. I was in the 'Renaissance,' on the boulevard, in the town park—he was nowhere. . . . Comrade Investigator, my crime was premeditated. . . . I picked up a rock from a heap of stones on the square and with this weapon in my hands, I looked for Utyovkin. . . ."

.

Buzheninov appeared in various parts of the town. He approached several inhabitants who wore white caps, and his face was so terrifying that they backed away in fright, and growled for a long time, looking at the rounded back of the "academist" with the sweaty shirt sticking to it.

The night grew lighter. Beyond the fields the half-moon rose from the July mist, and the gloomy shadows of the roofs stretched over the town. At last Buzheninov found Utyovkin. The latter stood near the Maslovs' orchard, leaning backward on his cane,—his cap on the nape of his neck. His mouth was open, as if he were choking.

"Oh, how foolish," Utyovkin uttered either to himself or to Buzheninov, who was approaching (in the shadow of a locust) with teeth pressed together, and hand hidden behind his back,—“and what a rotter this Nadka is. . . . And I, fool, ah, tra-ta-ra-ra. . . . It's Sashka who's with her,—very simple, after all. . . ."

Buzheninov threw himself sharply forward, and

using his whole strength, struck Utyovkin in the temple with the stone. . . .

The Box of Matches

That day Sashok rode into the outlying district on his father's business, and appeared late in the Maslovs' orchard. He was still hot with the sun of the fields, tanned and lighthearted. His pockets were filled with bean pods and peas stolen on the way.

Nadya was alone in the orchard on the pillows under the apple tree. Tired by the suffocating heat and the irritations of the day, she slept with her palm under her cheek, all dewy and disarrayed. It was thus that Sashok found her,—very nice little piece of candy. . . . He stole near, lifted a tress of hair from her face, and kissed her on the lips.

At first Nadya did not understand anything, she just opened her eyes and groaned. But where was common sense now? She felt so languid that she could not bend an arm. Sashok smelled of road dust, wheat, fresh peas. He lay down at her side and began to whisper sweet things in her ear. Nadya shook her hand,—that was the extent of her resistance. And why not? Anyway she was dishonoured in the town. . . . And Sashka whispered something about Hamburg, and fashionable clothes. . . . He murmured of silk stockings into her ear, the accursed one. . . . His hand was on Nadya's side already.

It was just then that Utyovkin said under the locust:

"Ah, tra-ta-ra-ra!"

Nadya shrieked and began to run. Sashok overtook her, and swore that he would marry her. She trembled like a mouse. They did not hear the short words between Utyovkin and Buzheninov, nor the blow, nor the cry, nor the struggle that followed.

Nadya repeatedly said:

"Let me go, let me go, I must go home."

Sashok answered insinuatingly:

"Home? All right." And he let go of her sweating hands. Nadya went away, not through the alleys as usual, but by a roundabout way through the pasture, where the shadows of little mounds blackened under the moon in a long deserted graveyard. Sashok followed her at a distance.

Vassili Alexeievich was not home. Matryona slept on the cellar trapdoor. Nadya hooked her door, undressed, and sat down on her bed, resting her chin on her little fists. Strange light from the half-moon fell through the window. Nadya looked at the hook and a slight tremor ceaselessly ran up her spine. It was not in vain that the town laughed "they mixed her brains up with an umbrella."

After a little while the gate grated. Somebody touched the door in the vestibule and entered. Nadya growled:

"I won't let you."

Somebody scratched on her door with a fingernail.

"You mustn't," Nadya murmured. Sashok's finger slipped into the crack between the door and the jamb, felt for the hook and lifted it. Nadya only moved her lips. Sashok came in, the moonlight fell on his big white teeth. Silent, he quickly sat down beside her on the bed, and Nadya's mouth felt the bony coolness of his teeth.

Sashok knew how to behave with girls. . . .

Suddenly his hands loosened, and he darted aside. Nadya opened her eyes and choked with fright,—Buzheninov stood in the doorway. . . . His eyes had no pupils, his hands gripped the doorjambs, the hands were in dark blotches, the shirt also. Sashok took a silent, headlong leap at Buzheninov, knocked him off his feet, and dashed out into the courtyard,—slammed the gate. All this took place in a few seconds. Nadya dived under her blanket, and rolled into a ball. Somebody shouted and there was the stamping of feet,—she was under the blanket, under the pillow, her eyes closed, her hands over her ears.

.

The point which the investigator regarded as so important: When and under what circumstances the box of matches found its way into the pocket of the non-smoking Buzheninov, was not cleared up. Buzheninov himself answered in two ways—the detail had slipped his memory. Although he well remembered the half-moon,—low in the window—in Nadya's room . . . and Nadya and Zhigalev in the

deep shadow on the bed. (He did not even realise at once who was on the bed.) He remembered how he cried: "I killed Utyovkin." (Neither Nadya nor Sashok heard this.) He could not tear his hands away from the doorjambs, and later fell on his face, knocked down by Sashok's head which struck him in the abdomen. He even remembered how the word "defiler" passed through his mind, and it was this that threw him into further action.

It seems that he did not at once get out of the dark corridor obstructed by various household articles. He broke some things and threw them about, then leaped into the kitchen. The awakened flies buzzed in the darkness. He struck his knee against the corner of the stove, and grabbed a small pressing-iron in the dark. When he felt the weight in his hand he swore vulgarly and ran into the street. As he ran, he remembered clearly that there were matches in his pocket, they rattled in the box.

.

Investigator: You affirm that until the moment when you followed Zhigalev with the iron in your hand, you had no thought of the fire?

Buzheninov: Perhaps. I had said before: "It would be well to burn this town." I did say . . .

Investigator: Does that mean that even then, your thoughts circled about the fire?

Buzheninov: I suffered much from an inner conflict, that is, from a conflict between myself and the environment into which I had fallen. I had had

only one school—war. I thought like a soldier: to sweep away all that was rotten. But after my talk with Comrade Khotyaintsev I calmed down. I began to work, and tried to submerge myself. I did not succeed in this. If I had been told then: "Cease to exist, for that is necessary for society, the Revolution and the future," I would not have trembled. . . . But I was caught with bait.

Investigator: Clearer.

Buzheninov: One can crush the fear of death in himself, vanity, the thirst for life. . . . Animal well-being. . . . All you wish. . . . The will is stronger than all . . . I proved that with my life, Comrade Investigator. But no matter how much I might will—my heart would beat as it itself wills. . . . The life of my body, everything, to the innermost of its secrets, is not in my power. . . . When my heart and veins are torn out, everything flies to the devil. . . . You ask what was the bait I swallowed. . . . Love. . . . That which is not in my power. All the fluids of life revolted in me. I don't know what glands, what toxins, poisoned my brain. . . . Perhaps, anyway . . . I don't know, I am not a physiologist. . . . They were tearing a woman away from me, tearing my flesh and blood,—a woman I loved so that I was not even conscious of how much I wanted her. The revolt began, and I was no longer in control of myself. I struck Utyovkin with a stone, and found relief. I do not know whether the poets write the truth about love—I did not experience it. I burned three years in the Civil War. . . .

I burned and tortured myself two years in the School of Architecture,—and saw azure cities in my dreams. . . . Perhaps that was love, too. . . . I do not know. . . . But when the stone pierced Utyovkin's temple—I felt relief for a moment. . . . If that is love, if that comes from love, then curse your love. . . . Excuse me, Comrade Investigator, you want to find out all the time how it happened that the matches got into my pocket. . . . When I saw what was happening in Nadezhda Ivanovna's room—I don't know how to impart it to you: things danced in my eyes, I saw red. . . . And when I ran after Sashka, after the defiler, with the iron in my hand, I heard the matches rattle in the box; my passion turned into a thought,—to burn everything that very instant. . . . Ah, yes, you still want to know about those matches. The devil knows from where they came. . . . I suppose I picked them up on my way. . . . When he fell, his hand dropped loose, and in the hand was a box of matches. I snatched it up. Why? I lit a match and looked in his face for a long time, until my fingers were burned.

Investigator: And so you affirm that you picked up the matches on the way with the purpose of lighting up the face of Utyovkin, whom you had murdered,—your testimony is rather important—and that you did not have any preconceived purpose of setting the town on fire? Is that right?

Buzheninov: You see, Comrade Investigator, all of this—they are parts only. At present I think that in one way or another—the catastrophe was

unavoidable. If it were not Utyovkin it would have been another. . . . If not the fire, something else. . . . Judge by the marrow of the matter, judge me, and not any accidental acts of mine.

Investigator: You will tell this in court. Now let me ask you what happened right after you ran out of the house, holding this iron in your hand. . . .

The Night from the Third to the Fourth of July

Buzheninov's story is obscure and contradictory. His efforts to find reasons for his conduct are futile. Everything here is illogical. He runs out of the gates flourishing the iron, and after only thirty paces or so no longer thinks about the defiler. He is in the grip of a new and tremendous desire. Passion rises in him in waves that rush over each other, all the dams are broken—everything is possible now. It all originates in the thought of the matches.

Buzheninov stopped short. He even whirled in the dust on the road, and as far as it was possible to see by the dim light, grinned broadly.

The moon was setting at the end of the alley. Its yellowish light, just above the ground, fell on Sashka Zhigalev, who stood at the crossing, some thirty steps from the house. Then Buzheninov's thoughts turned again to the defiler and he started to advance toward Sashka, without any anger now, but with a kind of wild curiosity.

Sashka was very angry, and when he saw the iron in Buzheninov's hand he decided to treat the man

without pity. He threw himself at Buzheninov, twisted his arm, tore the iron from his grasp, threw it aside, and struck Vassili Alexeievich so powerfully in the eye that the latter began to shake.

"Don't crawl into another's porridge, you damned abortion. You won't live here long anyway," said Sashka, and his second blow knocked Buzheninov off his feet. Then Sashka walked up the alley, without looking back.

For a second Vassili Alexeievich lost consciousness from the blow of the iron fist. But he lifted himself at once on his hands, and watched how Sashka's black figure, hiding the moon, moved away along the long shadows of the bushes between two gleaming fences. The wind began to rise in gusts, suffocating, as if it came from a furnace, and swept rubbish and dust into Buzheninov's face. Beyond the river in the impenetrable darkness winked the white eye of lightning. Sashka turned around and shook his fist. Then Vassili Alexeievich, covering his bruised eye with his palm, walked after Sashka in the direction of the square.

This was again completely unreasonable. (He explained to the investigator as follows: "If both my legs had been broken, I would have crawled after Sashka.") The wind grew stronger. Threatening storm, the trees hissed in the darkness. A cloud of dust enveloped the alley. Sashka disappeared in the direction of the square.

Next day was to be a big market day. Many booths had already been erected in the evening along

the town park, where the ancient poplars bowed in the wind, moving their branches with the rooks' nests. Nearer the river stood wagons with hay. Dust, hay and leaves whirled above the square.

Buzheninov saw Sashka again on the sidewalk under the illuminated windows of the "Renaissance." Several men, among them two militiamen, were talking with him in evident excitement. "He killed Utyovkin," Sashka's voice reached him. "I just saw him,—his whole shirt is bloody." People began making noise. From the windows of the beer parlour several inquisitive heads leaned out, covered with dust. Again a cloud swallowed the people and the beer parlour.

For a few seconds Buzheninov stood behind a corner. He was thinking rapidly, judging his surroundings. The meeting with Sashka was again deluged by a wave of irrepressible desire. His teeth rattled with impatience. Through the dust crimson lightning fell behind the river. The skies split with thunder. Buzheninov, crouching, ran across the square to the hay wagons. Behind his back sounded whistles. The wind threw disconnected words at him: "There he is. . . . Catch him. . . . Catch him. . . ." It seemed to him that a rook's nest flew above his head. "Some storm, the nests are flying," flashed in his consciousness. He dived among the wagons, and tore the hay with his hands, pushing through, crawling on his abdomen. Then he sat low, listened, trying to stop the beating of his heart. . . . The whistles came from left and

right. . . . There were more and more voices. . . . "He is here . . . he won't get away. . . . Feel under the wagon. Here, fellows. . . . Quicker. . . ." Apparently the entire beer parlour had joined in the pursuit, and moved, nosed and felt for him among the wagons.

Then Buzheninov struck a match and thrust it in the hay. Several innocent stems and a dry leaf began to burn. Buzheninov panted, pushed a little further and set fire to the hay to the right and the left of himself. Then he crawled under the wagons to the windward side, and pushed his last bundle of matches into the hay.

White waves of smoke began to roll among the wagons. Buzheninov ran off a bit, and turned. Flames broke out. His pursuers began to howl. Tongues of flame broke out in three places at once. The wind pushed them down, carried them far around, and tens of wagons rose in a tremendous pillar of red flame. The fire rushed into the darkness of the crazily sweeping wind and grew greater. Sparks and bundles of burning hay began to fly over the town. The alarm sounded. The trees with their waving branches and the cloud of rooks over them were lighted up.

Buzheninov stood on a bench on the boulevard above the cliff, and looked at what he had done. Flames were rising in several other parts of the town now. The wooden roofs, the fences, lonely trees, starlings' nests, were flooded with wild light. The flames danced over the whole market place.

The booths and the tents moved in the fire as though they were living things, then curled up and fell. The beams gleamed like red coals through the roof of the "Renaissance."

Women with bundles, and crying children ran over the boulevard. No one paid any attention to Buzheninov. A woman shrieked in a sickening voice, and fell to the earth. A bearded man in underwear ran by, his hands raised. Some one was carried by and laid down under a tree. All this was taking place before the eyes of Vassili Alexeievich, as if it were not real, as if it were a fragment of his imagination, a series of coloured pictures in the movies. There is no doubt that his mind was clouded in those minutes.

The town was burning in whole sections. The boulevard became empty,—it was impossible to remain there because of the great heat. But Buzheninov stood on a bench and looked.

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Here there is a gap in Buzheninov's testimony. He cannot remember anything except a tormenting feeling of pain in his brain at the sight of a telegraph post, with wires hanging on both sides of it on the square among the smouldering booths.

An insistent idea takes hold of him. . . . It is hard to understand how he was able to make his way through the burning streets to his house. . . . Here he remembers how he climbed through a window into the dining room and tore the plan of the

Azure City from the wall. The roof of the house was already in flames.

Through the pasture and the old graveyard he returned to the boulevard. This was near dawn. Instead of the market place a black ruin smouldered wide on all sides of him, sooty chimneys stuck out of it, and lonely, above the ashes, stood the telegraph post with the hanging wires.

"Comrade Investigator, I assure you that in that moment I was overwhelmed by a sensation of deep delight and sharp grief, I was alone in the midst of a desert. The terrible sensation of the self, of my own, personal I—that letter which rested its paws on the hot coals and was burned in the clouds and the dawn! At times now I find it dreadful to conceive: it has always seemed that one affirms one's self in creation, in expression. . . . But I, you see,—in what. . . . Or is it that I don't understand something? . . . Is it that I miss some screw? . . . Or do I live at the wrong time,—unplumbed, strange, wild? . . . Or is Comrade Khotyaintsev right? . . . I don't know. But I told everything honestly. . . . And I had to confirm the plan of the Azure City during the fire, that's all. . . ."

Holding the piece of canvas in his teeth, Buzheninov climbed up the post, but slipped, and lost consciousness. The rest is known. The investigation of this unprecedented case is ended.

Buzheninov, Vassili Alexeievich, appears before the People's Court.

THE BABY

VSEVOLOD IVANOV

I

MONGOLIA—a wild beast and a joyless one. The stone in it beastly, the water beastly, and even the butterflies try to bite.

And the heart of the man of Mongolia is mysterious—they say he is dressed in skins, looks like a Chinaman, and lives far from the Russians, on the other side of the desert Nor-Koi. They also say that some day he will go beyond China and India into unknown azure lands.

The same Irtish Kirghizes who had wandered into Mongolia, away from the Russian wars, were in the vicinity of the Russians here. And their hearts were good for nothing, glass-like,—one could see right through them. They came here unhurriedly—they brought their cattle, their children, even their sick with them.

But the Russians were driven here mercilessly. They were strong, healthy peasants. They had left their weak ones in the rock hills behind them—some died, some were killed. Their families, their property, their cattle, were left to the Whites. The peasants were angry, like wolves in the spring.

They lay in their tents in the hollows, lay and dreamed of the steppes and of the Irtish.

There were about fifty of them. Their leader was Sergei Selivanov. And the group was known as the Selivanov Partisan (Guerrilla) Detachment.

They were lonesome.

When the Whites drove them over the mountains, over the huge black rocks, they were afraid in their hearts, but now that they were in the steppe, they were lonesome.

The steppe was like the Irtish steppe,—sand, dry grass, a steel sky. All was alien, unploughed, wild.

And it was hard to get along without women.

They told vulgar camp tales about women, and when they could bear it no longer they saddled their horses and hunted Kirghiz women in the steppes.

And the Kirghiz women, on seeing the Russians, would lie down submissively on their backs.

It was disgusting to take them—motionless, with tightly shut eyes, as if they sinned with cattle.

The Kirghizes were afraid of the peasants, and they wandered far in the steppes. When they saw a Russian they would threaten with their rifles and bows, they would whoop, but they would not shoot. Perhaps they did not know how.

II

The treasurer of the detachment, Afanasi Petrovich Trubachov, was as weepy as a baby, and his face was also like a baby's, small, hairless, pink.

But he had long, powerful legs, like a camel's. And when he mounted his horse he would become severe. His face would be hidden, and he would sit, grey, angry, terrible.

On the eve of the Day of the Trinity three men were sent into the steppe to look for good hayfields, —Selivanov, the treasurer Afanasi Petrovich, and Drevesinin.

The sands smouldered under the sun.

Wind blew from above, out of the sky,—heat rose from the ground to the trembling sky, and the bodies of men and horses were dry and heavy like stones.

Selivanov said hoarsely:

"What hayfields we had there . . ."

All of them knew he was speaking of the Irish.

The sparsely bearded faces were silent. The sun seemed to have burned out the hair as it had burned out the grass in the steppe; and the eyes, narrow as the wounds made by fish hooks, were bloodshot.

Only Afanasi Petrovich answered piteously:

"Is there a drought there too?"

His voice was weepy, but his face did not cry, only the great smarting eyes of the horse under him struggled with tears.

The partisans moved in Indian file along the wild goat-paths into the steppe . . .

The sands smouldered in melancholy, the suffocating wind, redolent of the sands, glued itself hungrily to shoulders, to heads. Sweat burned in the

body but could not break through the dry skin to the surface.

Towards evening, when they were leaving the great hollow, Selivanov said, pointing to the west:

"Some one is coming."

True: the steppe trembled with rosy dust out on the horizon.

"They must be Kirghizes."

They began to argue. Drevesinin said that the Kirghizes were too far away and never approached the Selivanov hollow. Afanasi Petrovich said they were Kirghizes and there was no doubt about it—the dust was thick dust, Kirghiz dust.

When the wind rolled the dust up to them they all decided:

"Strangers."

The voices of the riders made their horses feel that something alien was borne on the wind. They moved their ears, and lay down on the ground till further orders.

Their grey and yellow bodies, with thin, pole-like legs, looked helpless and ridiculous in the hollow. They closed their large, frightened eyes, from shame perhaps, and panted.

Selivanov and Afanasi Petrovich lay on the edge of the hollow. The treasurer wept and sniffled. Selivanov always laid him near himself so that the treasurer might not be afraid—and the heavy peasant heart always grew lighter and mischievous from the almost childlike sobbing.

The path spread its dust. Wheels rattled, and the

long black manes of horses streamed in their collars like dust.

Selivanov said confidently:

"Russians."

He called Drevesinin from the hollow.

Two figures in red-banded caps sat in the new rush wagon. Their faces could not be seen on account of the dust, the red-banded caps seemed to float in a yellow whirlwind, the barrel of a rifle stuck out, and now and then a hand with a whip dove out of the dust.

Drevesinin thought for a moment, and said:

"Officers. On business, I suppose. An expedition."

And the mischievous one winked, his eye and mouth both part of the wink.

"We'll fix them, all right."

The wagon carried the two officers; it seemed to push the horses forward, sweeping the tracks behind it with sand, like a fox sweeping its tracks with its tail.

Afanasi Petrovich's voice drawled tearfully:

"Don't, boys. Better take them alive."

"You don't think much of your own life, do you?"

Selivanov grew angry and opened the lock of his rifle as noiselessly as one unfastens a button.

"There's nothing to weep over here."

What made them angry more than anything else was that the officers appeared in the steppe without a convoy, as if they had an innumerable force behind them—and that meant death to the peasants.

One of the officers rose to his feet in the wagon, looked at the steppe, but could not see much—the dust, the evening wind on the burned grass, on the two rocks near the hollow that looked like dead horses.

In the red dust were the wagon, its wheels, the two officers, their thoughts . . .

The rifles spoke.

The two caps, touching each other, fell together into the wagon.

The reins slackened, as if they had broken.

The horses leaped forward, almost ran away. But suddenly their withers were covered with foam. Their heavy muscles trembling, they lowered their heads, stopped.

Said Afanasi Petrovich:

“Dead.”

The peasants came near the wagon, looked into it.

The redcaps were dead. They sat shoulder to shoulder, their heads thrown back like hoods. One of them was a woman. Her hair was in disorder, half of it in dust—yellow and black,—and her soldier’s tunic was lifted high by her breast.

“Strange,” said Drevesinin. “It’s her own fault. Why did she wear the cap? Who wanted to kill a woman? We need women.”

Afanasi Petrovich spat at him:

“You are a villain and a bourgeois. You’ve got nothing good in you.”

“Wait,” broke in Selivanov. “We are not ban-

mits—we must make a list of this national property. Give me some paper.”

Under the front seat of the wagon, among the rest of the “national property,” was a white-headed baby boy in a woven Chinese basket, holding a corner of a brown coverlet in his hand. He was still unweaned,—he piped in a small squeaking voice.

Afanasi Petrovich said with feeling:

“Look at him, he talks in his own way . . .”

They expressed their pity for the woman again, and did not remove her clothes. The man they stripped and buried in the sand.

III

On the way back Afanasi Petrovich rode in the wagon, holding the baby in his arms and rocking him, singing gently:

“Nightingale, nightingale, little bird,
And the canary bird
Pitifully sings . . .”

He remembered the Lebiazhi settlement—his home, the pastures with the cattle, his family, his children, and wept in a thin voice.

The baby cried also.

The thin, dry, burned sands ran past the wagon and cried in their thin voice. The partisans raced on their tough, small Mongolian horses. Their faces were scorched, their souls were scorched.

Near the paths spread desert grass, wilted by the

sun, resembling the sand—thin, almost indiscernible to the eye.

And the sand and the grass were thin and bitter.

Ah, you paths, goat paths. Ah, you sands, bitter sands. Mongolia—a wild beast and a joyless one.

In the camp, they looked through the officer's belongings. Books, a valise with tobacco, shining steel instruments. One of these on three long legs was an oblong copper box with compartments . . .

The partisans came near, looked at the thing, touched it, weighed it in their hands.

They smelled of mutton fat,—they ate a great deal because they were bored, and their clothes were greasy. There were men with high cheek bones and soft, thin lips from the Don settlements; men with long black hair and dark faces from the lime quarries. And all of them had legs bent like bows and throaty steppe voices.

Afanasi Petrovich lifted the copper-topped tripod, and said:

“A telescope.”

He half-closed his eyes.

“It is a good telescope, it costs more than a million. They looked through it at the moon and they found gold there. They didn't even have to wash it, the gold was as clean as flour. All they had to do was to pour it in a sack.”

One of the younger city men laughed:

“Listen to the liar, damn him . . .”

Afanasi Petrovich became angry.

"Did you say that I was lying, you cornfield scarecrow? Wait."

.

The tobacco was divided, and the instruments were handed over to Afanasi Petrovich. As treasurer he could exchange them for something with the Kirghizes when the opportunity offered itself.

He put the instruments in front of the baby.

"Have a good time."

But the baby still puled. He tried to quiet him until he was all in a sweat himself,—still the baby puled.

The cooks brought the dinner. There was the thick odor of butter, porridge, cabbage soup. Large wooden spoons were taken out of boot tops. The grass in the camp was trampled flat. The hollow was deep, shady. From above a sentry on horseback cried:

"My time is up. I want to eat. Send the relief."

After they had eaten they remembered that the child had to be fed. The baby cried incessantly.

Afanasi Petrovich chewed some bread, and stuck the wet cud into the open little mouth, smacking his own lips encouragingly.

"Eat, you little devil."

But the baby closed his mouth and turned his head away—he would not take the food. He whimpered through his nose.

The peasants surrounded him. They looked at him over one another's heads. They were silent.

It was hot. Cheek bones and lips gleamed with mutton fat. Shirts were open, feet bare, yellow like the earth of Mongolia.

One suggested:

"Give him cabbage soup."

The cabbage soup was cooled. Afanasi Petrovich put his finger into it and then carried the finger to the mouth of the baby. The good fat soup flowed over the little lips on the pink shirt, on the stuffed coverlet.

The baby would not eat.

"A puppy is smarter—he eats off the finger."

"The puppy is a dog, and this is a human being."

"A fine idea!"

There was no cow's milk in the detachment. They thought of feeding him with mare's milk. But that was intoxicating, he might get sick.

They divided into groups among the wagons, debating anxiously. And Afanasi Petrovich rushed from group to group, a torn coat on his shoulders, his little eyes also looking torn. His voice was thin, anxious, childish, so that it seemed that the baby himself ran around complaining.

"What's to be done? He won't eat, men. Something must be done."

They stood, broad-shouldered, mighty of bone, looking on helplessly.

"This is woman's business."

"Of course."

"If a woman were here, he'd eat a whole ram."

"That's just it."

Selivanov called a meeting and announced:

"We can't let a Christian baby die like an animal. His father may be a bourgeois, but what about the boy?"

The peasants agreed.

"It isn't the baby's fault."

Drevesinin began to laugh.

"Grow big, boy. Grow big here, and fly to the moon, to the gold mines."

The peasants did not join in his laughter. Afanasi Petrovich lifted his fist and shouted:

"You ignorant dog."

He stamped his feet, waved his hands in the air, and suddenly cried in a piercing voice:

"A cow. He needs a cow."

The rest answered unanimously:

"If there is no cow, he will die."

"A cow at all costs."

"He'll burn up without a cow."

Afanasi Petrovich said decisively:

"I am going to get some cows, boys."

Drevesinin interrupted him:

"In Lebiazhi, on the Irtish."

"I've got nothing to go for to the Irtish, you damned chatterbox. I am going to the Kirghizes."

"To exchange the telescope."

Afanasi Petrovich rushed toward him and shrieked angrily:

"You scoundrel, you betrayer of humankind, you dirt. You want to have your mug smashed?"

And as they began to curse each other too seriously, Selivanov broke in on their quarrel:

"Enough."

The meeting voted that Drevesinin, Afanasi Petrovich and three others should go to the Kirghiz villages in the steppe and drive in a cow. If they could get more than one, so much the better. The cooks had but little meat on hand.

They hung their rifles on their saddles and put on Kirghizian fox malakhais so that they might look like Kirghizes from the distance.

"God be with you."

The baby was wrapped in the coverlet and put in a box under a wagon. A young fellow sat down near him, and in order to amuse the baby and himself fired into the grass from his automatic now and then.

IV

Ah, sands of Mongolia, joyless sands. Ah, rock that is blue sorrow, angry rivers digging deep in the earth.

The Russians rode over the sands. Night.

The sands smelled of heat and wormwood.

The dogs in the villages barked at the wolves and the darkness.

The wolves in the darkness howled at the villages and at death.

The Kirghizes ran from death.

"Will we ever save our herds from death?"

Green, suffocating darkness trembled over the sands, the sands could hardly hold it back, at any moment it might tear away and rush to the west.

The village smelled of dung-fuel and airan—sour milk. Lean, hungry Kirghiz children sat near yellow campfires. Near the children were sharp-ribbed, sharp-jawed dogs. The yurtas looked like haystacks. Beyond the yurtas was a lake, reeds.

From the reeds they opened fire on the yellow campfires.

The Kirghizes leaped out of their felt yurtas instantly. They yelled with fright, first one, then all together.

“Uy-boy. Uy-boy, ak-kizil urus. Uy-boy.”

They leaped on their horses that stood bridled day and night. The yurtas and the steppe echoed with hoof-beats. Wild ducks cried in the reeds:

“Ak. Ak.”

Only one greybeard fell headlong from his horse into the kazan, a great pot, which spilled over, and the old man, scalded, shrieked in a thick voice. Near him stood a hairy dog, tail between legs, and timidly stuck its hungry chops into the hot milk.

The mares neighed thinly. The sheep in the corral struggled as if in fear of wolves. The cows breathed heavily, as if they had lost their breaths.

The Kirghiz women, when they saw the Russians, lay down submissively on the felt.

Drevesinin laughed in wild abandon.

“Are we stallions or what? It isn’t always that we . . .”

Hurriedly he filled a flat Austrian flask with milk, and cracking his whip, drove the cows with their calves to the yurta. The calves, freed from the tether, swiftly pushed their heads into the soft udders, joyfully caught at the nipples with their large, soft lips.

"They're hungry, the devils."

And Drevesinin drove away the cows.

Afanasi Petrovich ran through the village again, and he was about to ride away when he suddenly remembered:

"He needs a nipple. The devils, they forgot the nipple."

He rushed into the yurtas to look for a nipple. The fires in the yurtas had been put out, so Afanasi Petrovich picked up a burning brand, and showering sparks, coughing from the smoke, searched for a nipple.

In one of his hands crackled the burning brand, in the other he held a revolver.

He could find no nipples. The submissive Kirghiz women lay flat on the felt. The frightened children howled.

Afanasi Petrovich grew angry and cried to a young Kirghiz woman in one of the yurtas:

"A nipple, heathen, give me a nipple."

The woman began to weep and hurriedly unbuttoned her silk tunic and then her shirt.

"Ni kirek. Al. Al."

At her side on the felt cried a child, wrapped in rags.

She was bending her legs.

"Al. Al."

But Afanasi Petrovich grasped her by the breast, squeezed it, and whistled joyfully:

"Good, a nipple."

"Ni kirek. Ni."

"All right. Don't crow. Come along."

He grasped her by the hand and pulled her out of the yurta. The fire brand fell down. The yurta became dark.

In the darkness he put the woman in the saddle before him, and touching her breast from time to time, galloped to the Selivanov hollow.

"I found it, boys," he said joyfully, and there were tears in his eyes. "I knew I would find it."

V

In the camp they found out that Afanasi Petrovich had not noticed that the Kirghiz woman had brought her own baby with her.

"All right," said the peasants. "There is enough milk for both. We have cows, and she is a strong woman."

The woman was silent and self-contained, and fed the babies where the men did not see her. The babies lay on the felt in the tent—one white, the other yellow—and squeaked in unison.

When a week had passed, Afanasi Petrovich declared at a meeting:

"There is deception going on, comrades. The

wench is giving her whole breast to her own brat, and ours gets only what is on the bottom. I saw her do it, boys."

The peasants went to see. The babies were like all babies—one white, the other yellow like a ripe pumpkin. But it seemed that the Russian baby was thinner than the Kirghiz baby.

Afanasi Petrovich spread his hands in despair:

"I gave him a name—Vaska. And see . . . It's a crime."

Drevesinin said:

"You're a sick boy, Vaska."

They found a stick, balanced it on a wagon tongue.

Then they tied the babies to the ends of the stick, to see which was heavier.

The babies, dressed in rags, hanging on hair ropes, both screamed at once. They smelled with a sharp baby odor. The woman stood near the wagon, and without understanding anything, wept.

The peasants looked on silently.

"Let them go," ordered Selivanov.

Afanasi Petrovich took his hands away from the stick, and the Russian baby instantly swung upward.

"The yellow-lipped devil," said Afanasi Petrovich wrathfully. "He gorged everything."

He lifted a dry ram's skull that lay near his feet, and put it on the Russian baby. The two babies were now parallel.

The peasants began to shout.

"She fed him up to weigh a whole head more, boys."

"You can't be any too careful with such."

"The beast."

"We've got other work to do than watch babies."

The peasants affirmed:

"You could never watch closely enough."

"Still, she's a mother."

Afanasi Petrovich stamped his feet and shrieked:

"So you want a Russian boy to die because of some heathen? You want Vaska to die?"

They all looked at Vaska—he lay there, white, thin.

The peasants began to feel bad.

Selivanov said to Afanasi Petrovich:

"Take that one . . . God be with him, let him die . . . The Kirghiz, I mean. We've killed a lot of them, one more . . ."

The peasants looked again at Vaska, and dispersed silently.

Afanasi Petrovich took the little Kirghiz, wrapped him in a torn sack.

The mother howled. Afanasi Petrovich struck her lightly in the teeth, and left the hollow for the steppe.

VI

About two days later the peasants crowded on tip-toe near the tent-flap and looked over one another's shoulders at the Kirghiz woman who sat on some felt, and suckled the white baby.

She had a submissive face with eyes as narrow as oat seeds. She wore a violet silk tunic and morocco-leather slippers.

The baby beat his face against her breast, his hands wandered over her tunic, and his legs moved awkwardly and ludicrously, as if he were jumping.

The peasants looked on, laughing mightily.

Afanasi Petrovich looked on tenderly, and sniffling, said tearfully:

“Just look at him eat.”

And beyond the canvas walls of the tent ran the hollows, the steppe, and alien Mongolia,—ran no one knows whither.

No one knows whither ran Mongolia—a beast wild and joyless.

MARYA THE BOLSHEVIK

ALEXANDER NEVEROV

WE knew many like that. She was tall, full-breasted, her eye-brows lifted like two arches—black. And her husband—as big as a thimble. Goat, we used to call him. You could hide him in a hat. And angry—good Lord preserve us! He'd start a battle with Marya, and bang on the table like a blacksmith on an anvil.

"I will kill you. I will rip your soul out!"

But Marya was a sly one. She'd begin to make much of him just for the fun of it, as if she were frightened.

"Prokofi Mitrich! Prokofi Mitrich! what is it?"

"I will cut your head off!"

"I've just cooked some porridge. You want some?"

She'd fill a plate for him to the very brim, and cover it with melted butter, and make butter stars. And she'd stand there bowing to him and feed him as if they were newlyweds.

"Eat, Prokofi Mitrich. I wronged you."

He'd like it—the woman was good to him, so he'd turn up his nose, and feel important.

"I don't want it."

And Marya like a serving maid near him—now a glass of water, now a pipe of tobacco. And when

he'd undress in the middle of the room—she'd put his best shoes in their place,—hide his socks behind the stove. And at night she'd rest him on her arm, stroke his hair, and purr in his ear like a cat. . . . The Goat would pinch her—she'd only smile.

“Now, now, Prokofi Mitrich! It hurts. . . .”

“And suppose it does hurt. . . . It won't kill you.”

And he'd pinch her again—he was her husband, not a stranger to her. And as soon as he was satisfied, she'd begin with him.

“Ah, you Goat, you Goat. Let me only swing twice—and that would be the end of you. . . . You think I am made of wood? You think it does not hurt to take it from a mushroom like you?”

At the beginning Marya didn't say very much, and carried her domestic troubles mostly within herself. But when the Bolsheviks came and freedom, when they began to tell women that they were equal to the muzhiks now, Marya also opened her eyes. Just let an orator come—she'd run to the meeting. As if she had lost all shame. She came to the orator one time and started making eyes at him like a girl. “Come,” she said, “Comrade Orator, and drink tea in our house.” The Goat was there, of course—on the spot—his face changed. His eyes grew dark, his nostrils expanded. Well, we thought that he'd start at her right at the meeting. But he bore up under it somehow. He sidled up to her and said:

“Come on home.”

And she, to spite him, perhaps, got up in front of us, and began a speech:

"Comrades and peasants!"

We just rolled with laughter. And here the Goat lost his temper too.

"Comrade Orator, give her hell."

At home he threw himself at her with his fists.

"I will rip your soul out."

And Marya teased him:

"Who's making all this noise here, Prokofi Mitrich? It's a bother, but nobody is afraid."

"I will cut your skirt short if you go to the meetings."

"You couldn't do it."

The Goat got excited, started to look for something to hit her with,—and Marya, threateningly:

"Just touch me. I will break all the pots on your goat's head!"

This was the beginning. The Goat would show his power—Marya hers. The Goat would lie down on the bed, Marya—on the oven. The Goat would go to her, she—from him.

"No, darling, things aren't what they used to be. Fast awhile."

"Come to me."

"I will not."

The Goat would jump about the bed, and go to sleep under a cold blanket, and when the affair reached that stage, people began to laugh. She stopped giving birth to children. She had borne two—and buried them. The Goat was waiting for a

third, but Marya struck. "I'm sick of this business."

"What business?"

"This business. You never gave birth."

"What do you think I am, a woman?"

"Well, I'm not a cow to give you calves every year. When I get good and ready—I may."

The Goat got up on his hind legs.

"I will tear your head off, if you dare to say such things."

But Marya insisted on her own.

"I," she says, "have become barren."

"What's that?"

"If you try to force me—I'll leave you."

She drove the Goat to desperation. He used to joke on the street, go visiting, but now—nowhere.

He'd climb up on the oven and lie there like a widower. If he should beat her, she might go away. And that was not all. She'd drag him to court, and the Bolsheviks would certainly put him in the jug. That was their style—to let women have their way. He gave her her freedom,—but he was ashamed of what people would say: that he had no character, that he was frightened. He went to a fortune-teller twice,—even that didn't help. Marya began to drag newspapers and books home from the Union Club. She'd spread them on the table, and sit there reading as if she were a teacher, moving her lips. She did not read aloud. The Goat, of course, would keep still. Let her read as long as she stayed home. Sometimes he'd even laugh at her.

"You're holding your telegram upside down. Some reader!"

Marya wouldn't pay any attention,—and books and papers, as everybody knows, make a different person of him who reads them. Marya reached that point too. She'd stand at the window and look out. "I am lonely," she'd say.

"What do you want?" The Goat would ask her.

"I want something—something . . ."

The Goat would control himself, control himself,—only he couldn't control himself any longer.

"I'll lace it into you, the Devil take your head. Something! What are you dreaming of?"

And it's true that she began to talk a little too much. She began to butt into the muzhiks' business. We would have a meeting—she'd always be there. The muzhiks began to get angry.

"Marya, go cook the cabbage."

What cabbage? She'd only roll her eyes. And then she invented a Woman's Department. We never even heard of a word like that—it didn't sound Russian. We looked, one woman came to her, another came, and—what the Devil! They opened study-courses in the Goat's house. They'd meet together, and begin to talk, to talk. The Commissar from the Soviet also began to come to them. He was our own man, from the village, we used to call him Vaska Shlyapunok, but when he joined the Bolsheviks he became Vassili Ivanich. And the Goat had to keep still. He only had to say one word, and ten voices would come in answer:

"Hey, hey, keep still."

The Commissar, of course, helped the women—that was his programme. "At present," he would say, "Prokofi Mitrich, you cannot yell at women—the Revolution." And the Goat would smile like a fool in answer. In his heart he was ready to tear all this Revolution in two—but he was afraid. There might be unpleasantness. And Marya was going on and on. "I," she said, "want to join the Bolshevik party." The Goat tried to shame her out of it. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Where is your conscience? Remember, God will not forgive you the way you misbehave yourself."

But Marya would only giggle.

"God? What God? When did you invent Him?"

She became altogether crazy. She lost almost all shame before the Commissar. He would bring her Bolshevik books, mix up the thoughts in her head, and she would only blush with pleasure. Once they sat at the table,—they thought that they were alone. But the Goat was under the bed. Jealousy had begun to torture him. He let the coverlet down to the floor and sat like a woodchuck in his hole. And the Commissar says:

"Your husband is so insignificant-looking, Comrade Grishagina. I cannot understand how you live with him."

Marya laughed. "I haven't lived with him," she said, "the last four months." He took her hands.

"Impossible, I will never believe it." And he

looked into her eyes and pressed closer to her. He embraced her waist, and held her. "I," he said, "sympathise with you."

The Goat heard all this under the bed, and began to feel bad. He wanted to take an axe and finish both of them—but he was afraid. He stuck his head out from under the coverlet and looked at them, and they started to laugh at him. "We knew all the time that you were under the bed."

The time came to re-elect the Soviet. The women came flying as to a fair. We were all making a racket, debating, when all of a sudden we heard:

"We want Marya, Marya Grishagina."

One of us said just for the fun of it:

"All right."

We thought it was a joke—but before we looked around it became serious. The women began to peck at their husbands like crows. Widows,—soldiers' wives—a cloud of them. What's more, our people didn't like to hold office, especially at that time—so they agreed. Marya? All right, let it be Marya. Let her burn her fingers.

We began to count Marya's votes—two hundred and fifteen.

Commissar Vassili Ivanich made a speech of congratulation. "Well," says he, "Marya Grishagina, you are the first woman in the Soviet of Peasants' Deputies. I," says he, "congratulate you upon your new office in the name of the Soviet Republic, and hope that you will uphold the interests of the working proletariat."

Marya's eyes became big, blushes covered her cheeks. But she stood there without a smile. "I," she says, "will serve you, comrades. Don't blame me if I fail,—help me."

The Goat began to feel terribly bad. He didn't know whether they were laughing at him or paying him honour. He came home and started to think: "How am I to speak to her now? She belongs to the Government." We also felt strange. Was it a play going on before our eyes? A woman—and suddenly in the District Soviet—to run our business. . . .

We began to swear amongst ourselves: "Fools that we were, what right had we to put a woman into such an office?"

Grandfather Nazarov told Marya straight to her face:

"Marya, you walked in at the wrong gates."

But she only shook her head.

"You elected me. I didn't go myself."

Later we came to the Soviet to take a look at her. We didn't recognise her. She put a table there, an ink-stand, two pencils, a blue one and a red one—a secretary stood in front of her with papers. She glanced swiftly over the lines on those papers. "This," she says, "is about the food question, Comrade Yeremeyev?"

"Yes."

She wrote her name on the paper and then again, like an office manager:

"Are the lists ready? Finish them quickly."

We didn't believe our eyes. This was our Marya! And she didn't even blush once. And she started to call all of us Comrades. Old man Klemov came to her once, and she to him:

"What," she says, "do you wish, Comrade?" And he couldn't bear the word. It would have been better to step on his corn. "Although," says he, "you are a District Member, I am no Comrade of yours." But do you think it rattled her? She only laughed. After another month she began to wear a pointed hat, a muzhik's blouse, and pinned a red star to the hat. The Goat tormented himself, tormented himself and began to ask her for a divorce. "Free me," says he, "free me from this kind of life. I," says he, "cannot bear it any longer. I will look for another woman," says he, "one I can bear." Marya only waved her hand. "All right," says she, "I agreed long ago."

She worked five months among us—and we got tired of her,—she was too much of a Bolshevik, and the other women had also started imitating her,—one would balk, another would balk, two of them left their husbands altogether.

We thought we'd never get rid of her, but a little thing happened—the Cossacks came down on the village.

Marya got into a wagon with the Bolsheviks, and left us. Where she went—I never found out. They say somebody saw her in another village, but maybe it wasn't she—maybe it was another one who looked like her. There are a lot of them around nowadays.

CRANES

VIACHESLAV SHISHKOV

OH, but there are nights in early autumn—contemplative, wisely sorrowful. The orphaned forests, the harvest fields, the meadows, the air, sleep in the arms of living dreams. But the earth has not cooled yet, the stars are in the skies, and a trembling bridge of moonlight spans the wide river. In the middle of the stream is a large sandbank, and the strange cries of the cranes can be heard coming from there through the bluish night. The autumn birds are strong, well-fed, happy, and they have begun to make love before their southward flight. . . .

"Taniukha, hark! . . . They are dancing . . ." said Andrei.

"And how!" answered the girl. "Let's get in the boat, and row out."

"They won't let us come near them. They are watchful. If I only had my gun!"

The camp-fire glowed. Tatiana pushed a potato into the hot ashes.

A black shawl was thrown over her flaxen hair, a thick lock fell over her tanned, shining forehead down to her blue eyes.

"I saw them dance once," said Andrei, whittling a design on an alder stick. "Last year I was fishing

with my grandfather. Well, we saw a lot. . . . We saw a mermaid too. She was sitting on a rock, braiding her hair. . . . All naked. . . . And pretty, like you. I saw you once, Taniukha, when you went bathing."

"Keep on lying." The girl's full lips widened into a smile.

"I saw you, I saw you. . . . I saw everything. I wanted to steal your shirt."

"Shameless."

Andrei stretched out to get a live coal for his pipe, but suddenly threw the girl down and began to kiss her passionately. She tried to free herself, turned away her head, refused him her lips, and murmured with a choked giggle:

"She will hear. . . . Stop. . . . Quit fooling. . . ."

A sheepskin coat moved on the other side of the camp-fire, a heavy sigh was heard. Andrei leaped away. Tatiana rose also. Passion flamed in her eyes, and her hands trembled. Andrei breathed heavily, hardly able to stand on his feet.

"Hark, they are dancing . . ." he said. His black gypsy eyes did not leave the rosy, half-open lips of the girl.

Night, the camp-fire, the moon, the cries of the cranes across the water caught the girl and the man in a net of intoxication. The earth rocked under their feet like a boat on the river, and the blood that ran rapidly in their veins pushed them irresistibly toward each other.

"Let us go to the water . . . under the cliff . . . to look at the cranes. . . ." Andrei's voice burned her heart.

"I won't go. You'll try to kiss me again," the girl murmured smilingly, drawing nearer to him.

"So help me God, I won't. Let's go."

"You lie. You'll try it."

Andrei, purring a melody, paced away toward the river. Tatiana followed him with a long, tenacious look, stood silent awhile, and then hallooed:

"Nastasia, are you sleeping?"

The sheepskin coat did not move. Tatiana also began to purr a song, her cheeks flamed and grew pale by turns. She fished the potato out of the ashes, put it in her tucked up skirt, and without looking around, ran down the fresh, dewy path.

Silence descended on the camp-fire. The flames, unattended and neglected, weakened, drowsed. Fettered horses clanked their chains in the distance. A star fell, making the blue night luminous for a passing moment.

Nastasia, springing up, tore the sheepskin coat from herself with a muscular hand.

"The devils! . . . And I must watch them . . ." she uttered wrathfully, looked around, and ran toward the cliff like a young mare, crying:

"Taniukha! . . . Tanka! . . . I will tell grandmother! . . ."

In the autumn great fires are made in the cornkilns. The sheaves must be dried before morning.

And who will help Nastasia? Who will bring pitch from the woods, who will help thresh to-morrow? She was alone. It was over a year now since her husband had been killed near Yamburg by the soldiers of the villain Yudenich. Who would help the young widow to get along?

It was deep, grey night, the cocks had crowed thrice. It was hot in the corn-kiln. Andrei, her neighbour, had taken off his fur vest and was poking the wood in the oven. There was a smell of smoke and the intoxicating steam of ripe rye sheaves.

"Thanks, Andriushka. . . . After all, you did help a poor widow."

"I'll just throw in some more wood, and it will be enough. . . . I am going to sleep. You will take off these sheaves and set up the others."

Nastasia sat sadly on the sheaves near the oven and did not answer. The short muslin blouse moved up and down like a living thing on her high breast, and her strong cheeks flushed.

"But remember, don't say a thing to Taniukha," Andrei said with shaking voice, squinting at Nastasia's breast.

Nastasia breathed more heavily.

"Are you afraid?" she drawled with sarcasm.

"I am afraid," said Andrei, and his practiced hand threw her down on the sheaves.

It was hot in the corn-kiln,—suffocating. Outside there was a mist, and through it the full moon scarcely whitened in a broad ring.

When Andrei walked home, the grass, covered

with hoarfrost, whispered under his feet. A long-eared hare whisked away from some cabbage stalks over the garden beds into the mist.

"Keep going, bunny!" shouted Andrei.

Dawn was near. Mumbling a prayer and bending her back, Tatiana's grandmother was walking to the well for water. Here and there morning light yellowed in the village windows.

Michaelmas came with a great snow. The village celebrated it with vodka, food, songs, dancing, cursing, fists and clubs.

All the leaders of the village were having a good time, even the Chairman of the District Soviet had come from a neighbouring village. After mass, Father Semyon, the priest, passed in turn near every house, with a cross in his hands. In the evening he had to be supported, for he could no longer stand, and he served mass on his knees, as best he could. Toward night the drunken Chairman was also helped to his honourable host's. At dawn both the Chairman and the priest were being put into one bed in the last iron-roofed house on the outskirts of the village.

"Something evil might happen," the owner rumbled, half-falling on his nose. "It's strange—together with a priest. . . ."

"Not at all, it will turn out all right," mumbled the guests. "He's a good fellow, he supports the Soviets every time he opens his mouth."

The best time to be had was at the widow Nas-

tasia's. She had to be merry, she had to tempt the young men and the bachelors, for time was passing, and a woman's management was no management. Her heart beat like a bird.

*"Rise, young fellow, with good cheer,
Aie-liu-li, with good cheer,"*

thundered the strong young voices till the rafters rang. The golden flames of the home-made candles trembled.

Andrei curved his body, crossed his arms, and moved in the middle of the circle.

*"Pick the one that you like best,
Pick the one that you like best!"*

He bowed low, his rough, iron hand grasped a hand soft as silk:

*"Kiss the one that you like best,
Kiss the one that you like best!"*

and Tatiana, pulled from the full-voiced circle, put up her closed lips.

"Stop the game," the widow cried loudly, her voice strained. "Eh!" Her cheeks were on fire, she grasped her black-haired head. "Eh! . . . Girls, let us have a glass each. . . . Fellows! . . ." Her eyes looked jealously at Andrei, she laughed cruelly and slapped his shoulder with her hand "Andriusha. . . . Eh! . . . Do you remember?"

The glass made its drunken rounds. Tanya, pale and grief-stricken, walked over to the window. Snow whirled outside, an accordion wheezed.

"Let's dance! Girls. . . . I want to dance!"

Nastasia goaded them on, waving a red kerchief. "And why the devil don't you marry me? . . . Eh! . . . Just let me kiss you. . . . Just let me hug you once."

The oven trembled from the dancing, the outcries, the wheeze of the accordion.

Tatiana felt strangely ill at ease. She walked out of the house quickly, she felt sick, she swallowed falling flakes of snow. And suddenly she found herself in the grasp of an all-pervading fear.

For a whole week Tatiana behaved as if she had lost her reason. In the darkness of night she would awaken and weep quietly. Grandmother Darya called to her one night:

"What's the matter?"

Tatiana was silent.

In the morning grandmother Darya looked long and fixedly at her from beneath bushy, angry eyebrows.

"Do you feel bad? Oh, you. . . ."

The old woman dragged herself to see Nastasia.

"Listen to me, widow, listen to me." She shook her black headgear. "Was that the way you watched my granddaughter? And I, old fool that I was, let her spend her nights with you, thinking you were decent. Listen, tell me, who is the man?"

The chopping knife fell out of Nastasia's hands.

"What happened?" and her lips whitened.

"What, what? You know yourself what!"

"The devil himself can watch her!" the widow

suddenly shouted into the old woman's wrinkled face, and rattled a poker. "Go find out yourself who the man is. . . ."

Grandmother Darya shook her head and chewed her toothless mouth.

"Tfu!" And she walked out, slamming the door.

Nastasia fell on the bed and howled aloud. Of course Andrei would marry Tatiana now.

And Andrei, crunching the frozen snow underfoot, was walking to the District Soviet headquarters to read a newspaper, thinking to himself: "Nastasia has two samovars, two cows and a good horse. Tatiana is poorer. Whom shall I marry? And I must get married. What the devil, maybe it would be best to see the witch-doctor and ask him?"

He walked, whistling angrily, thinking about Nastasia again: "If I marry Taniukha, Nastka will kill me. . . . She is a desperate woman. . . . A witch."

He met Tatiana, who was carrying flax seed to the oil refinery.

"Hello, Andreiushka." Both stopped in the middle of the forest road. "How are you getting along?"

"All right. And you?"

"Badly. I'm thinking all the time."

She looked into his gypsy eyes with her own sad blue ones, and tried to smile.

"And you know nothing, Andreiushka?"

"Nothing."

Tatiana sighed. Her face darkened. She lowered her head and looked at the ground.

"Well, you will find out soon, Andriusha. . . . Good-bye."

He looked in her wake, pitied her, and cried:

"Hey, Tanya! Do you remember the cranes? Wait till spring comes. We'll go to listen to the nightingales."

The girl was walking away silently.

Tatiana continued to go to the spinning bees, but she danced no longer,—she had a headache, she would say,—and she spun thread and sang sad songs with her friends. The youth of all the neighbouring villages would come together for the games, for the Fast of St. Filipp was about over, and the marriage season would soon start. And more than one young man cast covetous eyes at Tatiana,—there was not another girl prettier, kinder, more laborious—three of them even used knives on her account when they were drunk.

Andrei had not yet decided in his heart, and treated all the girls equally, but it was Tatiana whom he treated to sunflower seeds, and when he sat with her, he would embrace her and murmur:

"Don't worry, we are going to be married. . . . Do you want a Soviet wedding?"

Many men chased after Nastasia too. But Nastasia fed only one with pancakes and home-brew,—Andrei.

"I know—you want to marry Tanka," she would say, seeing him to the door in the night. "Marry her, marry her. . . . The girl carries a load I

think,—the whole district will laugh at you, you fool.”

One morning grandmother Darya took her purse and a walking staff and hobbled across the woods to the witch-doctor’s mill.

Yerofeich had long been known in the village as a mighty wizard. When the partisans had attacked the countryside, confiscating bread and property, they could not find the witch-doctor. They searched and searched—not only the witch-doctor but his mill too had disappeared and one of the partisans died from cholera within an hour.

Three days before, grandmother Darya had met the wife of the Chairman of the Soviet, Olyona Mitrevna, in Father Semyon’s home.

“Oh, grandmother Darya, go to him, go to him. He is wonderful. My husband started drinking on Michaelmas and he hasn’t stopped since. And the inspectors were to come from the city any day. I told him: Write a promise to the Lord,—Give me strength, O Lord, to stop drinking,—seal it in an envelope, and let Father Semyon put it under the altar. But not my man,—he began to yell: ‘He is a drunkard! He is an impostor, he gives opium to the people.’ Well, I went to the wizard, and he gave me some wolf’s offal and a magic saying. And my man sobered up,—two weeks have passed and he hasn’t been drunk.”

Grandmother Darya went to Yerofeich. The witch-doctor sat near his oven, powdering a cat’s

liver in a mortar, and a crow walked on the floor near him, cawing.

"Did you take off your cross?"

"I took it off, I took it off, little father. Make the young man love the girl."

The witch-doctor took the linen and a silver half ruble from the grandmother, gave her a broom made of twigs, and explained what should be done.

Happy, the grandmother returned home toward evening. She had just crossed the threshold when Andrei was at the door.

"I come on serious business. How are you?"

Grandmother Darya struck his back with the witch-doctor's broom.

"Hocus-pocus! . . ."

"What's the matter, grandmother?" Andrei turned to her, amazed.

"Hocus-pocus!" the grandmother struck him again and yet again.

Andrei laughed—the old woman had lost her mind, he thought. He sat down near the table, and when he had finished laughing, said to Tatiana's father:

"Listen, uncle Grigori, I want to marry your daughter, Tatiana Grigorievna."

"Call Tanka, mother," Grigori said hurriedly.

Grandmother Darya ran to find her granddaughter, overcome with joy.

"Some witch-doctor. . . . Some witch-doctor. . . ."

More than a month had passed since Andrei and

Tatiana registered their Soviet marriage before witnesses. And naturally, as they were not married in the Christian manner in church, husband and wife could not be together,—the newlyweds lived as they had done before—separately.

Grandmother Darya,—what kind of a marriage was this, she thought,—still believed in the magic broom, and now and then she would strike either Andrei or Tatiana with it.

“Hocus-pocus!”

But nothing came of it. The grandmother grew angry, chopped up the broom with an axe, threw the pieces into the oven, and went to the district militiaman to make a charge against the witch-doctor.

“That forest devil,” said the militiaman, “fooled me badly too. My ram was stolen, so I went to the witch-doctor, and that devil made me follow a wrong clue. I wanted to arrest him, but it was dangerous: he might have wished a rupture on me.”

The grandmother began to cry, not about the linen and the half ruble,—about her granddaughter, Tanya.

And meanwhile her granddaughter,—Oh, but the winter would soon be over,—spoke to her unmarried husband with tears in her eyes.

“Andrei. . . . Why don’t you marry me in the real way? Let us go to the altar.”

“O this religion, faith . . . I can’t. You just read the papers.”

“We live separately, like strangers. You are not one of our household, you are nothing.”

"Ha!" Andrei exclaimed angrily. "I am ready to come and live with you to-morrow. This minute even."

Grigori, who had just entered the room, heard him, and cried out:

"I'll show you how you will come here. One can find husbands as rotten as you are everywhere. . . . You are only trying to find a way out for yourself, devil. You spoiled the girl, and . . ."

"She is not a girl. She is my wife. Read the decree."

"Go to with your decree! Decree! It's none of your peasant's business to know decrees. Have you no conscience at all?"

"You are a fool, Grigori, nothing else."

And with that Andrei left the house.

Grigori began to curse the grandmother and Tatiana and the Soviets and the whole wide world.

"Why are you angry, father? Andrei wants to live with me. It's you who won't let him."

"And I never will! A fine business! They registered in secret with some clerk or other. To hell with your devil's marriage! Go to Andrei's house, in civil marriage."

"I would have gone long ago, but his old people won't take me."

The grandmother also attacked her.

"It's your own fault. A girl's honour hangs on a hair, and once you lose it you can't hold it with a rope."

Tanya fell on a bench and began to weep and howl as if she had lost her mind.

"Ah, is that it? Grandmother, get the whip . . ."

Spring sunsets moved across the sky, in each other's wake. The days became longer. The cranes came flying from the south.

Tatiana did not go anywhere. Her face was sad, covered with spots, and her thoughts were sad too. Nastasia showed off in a pair of new low boots, in a yellow shawl with stripes. Widowers and young fellows were courting her. She refused them.

Andrei had strong differences with his father. He was moody and thoughtful, he went to see Tatiana rarely. And when he did come, he would quarrel with Grigori, and leave. His father and Grigori insisted:

"Marry the girl in the real way, before the altar."

"I want to live according to the decrees," answered Andrei. "Once we have new laws, we must obey them."

"Your decree; she's walking around in a pair of squeaky boots . . . That's your decree," Grigori rattled hoarsely, and his eyes filled with gall. Andrei reddened.

One day Grigori was not home, grandmother Darya had also gone away. When she returned, she could not find her granddaughter. She went to the door of the best room. The door was held by a hook on the inside.

"Open!"

The door was not opened. The grandmother began to tremble. She knocked and knocked, but all she could hear was a moaning behind the door. The grandmother ran into the garden, put a ladder to the window, and climbed in.

Tatiana was in the convulsions of child-birth, she gnawed the pillow and groaned.

"Oh, my God!" the grandmother cried aloud. "The dirty thing hooked the door. The jade wanted to strangle the child. Sin, sin . . ." And the grandmother hobbled out to wash her hands.

Nastasia's boots squeaked in the vestibule.

"Hello, grandmother Darya. Didn't one of my hens get into your yard? Whom do you want to strangle? Eh?"

"You, you yellow shawl! You, harlot! You, who tempt husbands away from their wives. Go away, go away!"

The grandmother washed her hands, brought an ancient ikon to the head of Tatiana's bed, lit a holy candle, opened the gates wide so that the child might be born more easily,—she should have opened the royal doors of the altar, but she had no time,—and returned to her granddaughter, to deliver the expected great grandchild.

Meanwhile Andrei stood before Grigori, hat in hand, and, blinking his gypsy eyes, was saying:

"I've decided, uncle Grigori—father—to disobey the decree. If you want it in church, let it be in

church. I agree. They gnawed my head off at home."

Grigori was attaching a coulter to a plough in the barn. He listened to Andrei with severity, and said:

"All right."

They sat down and began to smoke.

"Where were you going?"

"To the woods," answered Andrei. "We need more logs."

And meanwhile, the infant was born, hardly alive. On the next day he died.

Grandmother Darya had many, many worries. She took some linen and her last silver half ruble and went to see the priest. Father Semyon tried the half ruble with his teeth, felt the linen with his fingers, and agreed. And at night, stealthily, they buried the infant in the churchyard.

The night was dark, warm, the fields seemed to breathe.

The grandmother took to bed, Grigori began to drink, Tatiana to get better.

Three evenings later Andrei met Nastasia in the co-operative store: the widow was buying herring, Andrei tobacco.

Andrei's heart was heavy with grief. And the widow squeaked in her half boots, showed off, her breast held higher than ever. Andrei went home. Behind him he heard Nastasia's witch-like squeak:

"Why so proud, Andrei? When is the wedding?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Well, perhaps you'll invite me to come. Was it a son or a daughter God gave to Tatiana?"

"What are you talking about I don't know. I just came back from the woods."

"Better go over there. . . And look to it, or they may strangle the child. . . I overheard something. . ."

Andrei breathed heavily, looked wildly around, and suddenly becoming all cold, dragged his feet along the road as if he were in a dream.

"Let's go and drink tea . . . I have herring, too," Nastasia glanced oilily into his eyes.

Andrei walked behind the widow as if he were enchanted, without stopping, against his will. She was saying something, but he did not listen. He was all with Tatiana, he wanted his child, yet he did not want him, and in his soul he felt sad, sick, as one feels before a great catastrophe.

And only after the first cock crowed, Andrei, joyful with the widow's home-brew, walked along the village street, purring a song.

"Wait. I must knock."

When he knocked, Grigori looked out of the window.

"Hello, my future father. My father-in-law. And where is my legal wife? They say you have a child here. Where is the child?"

"There is no child."

"What do you mean there is no child?" Andrei panted, his legs unsteady. "There is a child! If you and grandmother try to strangle him, I'll have you in prison. . . I know you, brother!"

A night watch-woman stopped sounding her rattle, hid herself in the darkness, and listened.

"Go on, boy, sleep it off," said Grigori and began to close the window.

Andrei grasped the sash, and shouted:

"Then I give you my written refusal. I don't want to! That's how it is—in the order of the day. If you strangled him, to the devil with her! Marry her yourself."

As he approached his own house, Nastasia wrapped herself around him like a flame; deliriously she kissed his eyes, his forehead, his lips, and murmured:

"Darling. . . Sweetheart. . . You turned them down. . . I heard you myself. . . You will be mine to the grave now."

Andrei moved over to the widow's house. Tatiana did not grieve long: Andrei did not love her, never loved her. Well, what of it? There were other young men in the world. Many of the Red Soldiers had returned home: there was talk, courting, military bearing. There were bridegrooms!

Tatiana began to recover swiftly, to bloom. Her body grew strong, and you could not tear your eyes away from hers. She was beauty itself.

The green fields bloomed, Tatiana bloomed, but

in the backyards, in the alleys, through mud, through women's ears, through old gossips' spittle, rumours spread about Tatiana: she had strangled her child.

And sorrow came to Tatiana.

Birds were building their nests, nightingales trilling all night in the wild cherry trees, young men and girls playing, dancing, singing. There was much match-making that spring. There would be many weddings.

Manka, and Palashka, and the two Dunkas,—all the twenty girls in the village were happy,—they danced, they could not get away from the young men. Only Tatiana did not dance. No one wanted to take her. She sat alone, as if she had the plague. And when she returned home, she would weep disconsolately. At the third party she was cold-shouldered, not a single young man even looked at her. Sorrow came to Tatiana.

She stopped going to the parties, locked herself in at home, tore her hair, wept. When Grigori looked at his daughter, his hands would grow limp, the blood would become black in his heart. Grandmother Darya died from grief.

"I'm not going to sit like this forever," Tatiana said one evening to her father, sobbed, and walked out.

Her father was finishing his supper. Her words were like a knife drawn across his throat. His heart grew small with fear, he left the table and followed his daughter.

It was dark in the vestibule.

"Tatiana!"

The darkness swayed ominously, and he heard a rattle.

"Oh!" Grigori shrieked wildly. "Lord Jesus!" He began to tremble, took his daughter from the rope,—his legs bent under him,—and carried her to a bed.

When she had barely recovered her senses, somebody knocked at the window. He had a beard.

"Here, Grigori Mitrich. A letter for you. Through the district postoffice, registered."

"From my son," Grigori thought confusedly. His son had a big job in a factory in Petrograd. But this was no time to read letters.

Tatiana saw the letter next morning. Her brother did not promise to come,—he was head over heels in work,—he wanted her to come to him.

"Why are you souring in the village? What can the village give you? If you yourself write me that the life is unbearable, then come to me. I shall see to it that you take some study courses and become a human being."

Tatiana's heart was suddenly aflame to go.

"Although I feel sad about it," said her father, swallowing his tears, "you may go."

The summer passed, Tatiana's preparations for her journey ended, autumn had come. And everything was just the same: dirt, poverty, home-brew. In the mornings the rye was thrashed on the barn floors with drumlike blows. And on the sandbank,

the cranes played in the twilight. Andrei stole on them in his boat, and emptied his gun.

From that time a crane with a broken wing lives in Andrei's house. He will rise no more to the clouds, he will live on the ground with Andrei until death.

Morning. Mist. A wagon rattles along the road.

"Farewell, my village."

Nastasia could scarcely drag the confused Andrei from the window.

Grigori, his hat low on his forehead, waved the whip and whistled joyfully, but his heart was heavy. Tatiana was on the wagon. She was going to seek her future. Her face was fresh and happy. Her luminous eyes looked fixedly into the distance. But the distance was misty, fog hung low above her head.

Through the fog, the open cries of the passing cranes fell to the earth. They flew south, straight to their goal.

What was fog to them, when in the heights above were freedom and sunlight?

THE MIRACLE

MIKHAIL VOLKOV

I

GRANDMOTHER FETINYA is old, very old, and her cabin is even older.

Day by day Grandmother is getting nearer to her grave, but the cabin is ahead of her,—she takes one step, the cabin takes two; it is almost all in ruins—it hardly sticks together,—let the breeze blow a little more strongly and the cabin will go to pieces.

When the night covers the earth with her sarafan, the mocking man in the moon teases Grandmother with his white tongue through the cracks in the walls, and the stars, the eyes of angels, smile and tempt Grandmother to come to them: "Come to us, Fetinya, servant of the Lord, we will keep you safe from the storm beneath our wings, we will warm you with our breath."

She would be happy, so happy to go, but the Lord keeps her on the earth; it seems she has not prayed enough to atone for all her sins here below.

She is most afraid when the winter, like an angry mother-in-law, growls in the snowstorm, and Old Man Frost breaks into the cabin, and sits in a corner pulling at his beard, and beats the walls with his fists, and tries to reach out for Grandmother. It

is good that his eyes can see nothing because he is so old, and many thanks to the warm oven that it hides her from him.

Grandmother rises at night. The ikon-lamp winks to the ikons; there in a corner grieves the visage of the Saviour; to the right the Eternal Mother sorrows, to the left John the Baptist looks at the Saviour tenderly; at his side St. Nikola is frowning—a severe saint. And other godly saints look at her also, some from the ikons and some from pictures, and they gaze so kindly that a great tenderness descends on Grandmother, as if one of them patted her soul.

She loves and respects the godly saints; whenever she sees a picture with the face of a saint on it, she hangs it on the wall at once.

Grandmother prays and prays and all that she asks from the saints is that she may keep her cabin till the day of her death.

Though her corner is poor, still it is hers. Strangers' bread is hard to eat; it is not in vain that it sticks half way in the throat,—to be a homeless cuckoo bird in her old age would be much more bitter.

.

Father Ivan, when he comes to consecrate the water, always says: "Fetinya, your house is protected by the saints unseen."

And she tries to tell him that she had something like a vision at sunset some days ago: "One of the saints walks along the alley and knocks at the walls

with an axe, father. But who he is I do not know. His face is hidden by the wall."

And father Ivan intones "In Jordan Waves." He has no time to waste—the parish is so large.

Grandmother forgets where she hid the five kopeks for mass, it has left her mind entirely; she turns here and there but she cannot find it. Father Ivan looks puffed like a mushroom after rain:

"Fetinya, you deprive others of God's charity. Give five eggs at least."

Grandmother hobbles away for the eggs, and picks up ten in her hurry, choosing the biggest ones, too.

Every one knows that the eyes of a priest are the eyes of greed, his hands are like shovels, his pockets like a deep gulf,—and all the ten eggs disappear in his pocket.

Grandmother's eyes are filled with dew: "I saved them for Easter Day, and now they are all gone."

II

Grandmother Fetinya wanders down the street, a bundle of brush on her back, and the wind plays about her like a young puppy; now it chases a feather, now it rolls a handful of straw along the road, now it pulls at the hem of her sarafan.

Suddenly the wind sweeps a piece of paper from an alley, and begins to tease Grandmother. She bends to pick up the paper but the wind tears it from her hands and carries it away to the nettle

which stings but does not give it up. Grandmother can hardly take it off.

She smooths the paper out—it is the picture of a saint. He is bearded and hairy, and his face is ascetic—his eyes pierce to the very soul, like needles.

Grandmother wonders who it might be. “Maybe he is an apostle? He is a little like St. Mark, but there is no lion’s head near him. Maybe it is St. Stratilat the Warrior? But I can see no armor.”

She cannot guess who it is.

She glues the picture in the holy corner near to John the Baptist, lights the ikon lamp and prays:

“God’s little saint, forgive me, a sinner and a fool,—I do not know by what name to call you,—utter your saintly word for me before the Lord, tell him that the servant of the Lord Fetinya prays that her cabin may be safe from lightning, from fire, from dry rot.”

The ikon-lamp winks, the saint smiles in pity—he must indeed be merciful.

.

On the other side of the window rain scratches the glass with his claws, thunder quarrels with lightning.

Somebody knocks.

Grandmother leans against the glass; darkness like that of the grave,—she can’t see anything. Now the lightning licks the darkness with a tongue of light—a man stands outside and his voice is impatient.

“Let me in quicker!”

Grandmother hobbles to the door.

"Come in, come in, my dear, and don't hit the door-jamb with your head. You must be cold, my dear. From where does the Lord bring you?"

"From the city. I have fought the rain all night. I couldn't find anybody up in the whole village,—they sleep like the dead. Maybe you have something to eat, granny? I am as hungry as a wolf."

"I have some bread here. Eat it. It is good for you. I am sorry I have nothing else. I have nothing at all but bread."

"It's all right."

"You might at least cross your forehead, my dear. . . . You see the ikons over there. . . . It is a sin. . . ."

"Eh, granny, if you don't work with your own hands, no saints will help you."

"What are you saying, my dear. It happens sometimes that the Lord sends to those who live righteously. . . ."

"Hold your pocket open wider, and wait for Him to drop something in it. A saint may rob another and think that it was God who sent him riches. But what's the use of talking to you, old woman, you won't understand anyway. . . . A-a! And what kind of an ikon is this?"

"I don't know, my dear, what godly saint he is. Maybe you can tell a foolish old woman under what name I am to pray to him. . . ."

"It's a foreign name, grandmother. It isn't his name that is important, but his teaching."

"And what did he teach, my dear?"

"To work, to work and to love each other. . . ."

"Truly, my dear, truth is in his words. They say that the Lord himself commanded us to work in the sweat of our brows. . . ."

"And you pray to him also?"

"Why shouldn't I pray to him, when his ikon is here to be prayed to? I was praying to him just before you came in that my cabin might remain as it is till the hour of my death."

"Yes, your cabin looks like a mouse hole. Pray, pray, granny, maybe you'll get your wish from him before you get it from all the other saints."

"It is sinful, my dear, to make fun. Oh, how sinful! Be careful,—they will hang you on a hook by your tongue in the next world."

III

Near autumn, when the sky ceaselessly shakes water from itself like a wet hen, and the wind whines piteously like a blind beggar, it is a torture to live in the cabin.

Once, early at dawn, Grandmother hears a sound that makes her fear a bear is walking on the roof, breaking it, smashing it. "Well," she thinks, "the end has come, the cabin is falling in."

She leaps out on the street, and loses control of herself: carpenters have gnawed the whole roof like wolves gnaw their prey,—only the ribs remain.

Grandmother whimpers:

"Help! Help! Help me, good people. The robbers are taking away all I have."

And the carpenters from the roof:

"What are you staring for? We're from the Soviet. It's the same to us where we work as long as we work. We were told to work here, and we are working. That's all."

Grandmother hears how the wagons carrying beams squeak like storks, she sees them gather in a flock near the cabin.

Grandmother becomes as stiff as a garden scarecrow. "What is all this about?" And she cannot understand.

The carpenters beat and cut with their axes like woodpeckers in the forest,—here they add something, there they put something up, over there, if a beam is rotten, they put a new beam in, and the cabin is reborn,—it is mottled in its patches like an old coat, but it is not its beauty that matters, but the warmth in it—enough for Grandmother's whole life.

Grandmother is in doubt:

"My own, and who will live in it? Will they drive me from my old nest?"

"Who? Whoever lived here before, will live here now. Don't be afraid, the Soviets protect the poor, they never hurt them."

A mason comes, makes dough out of clay, plasters the oven,—Live in your new cabin with your warm oven, Fetinya, dear soul, and be well.

And Grandmother lives gloriously,—the oven exhales warmth, just exhales it.

Grandmother puts the saint in the Baptist's place—side by side with the Saviour. "He is very merciful indeed—he must stand near to the Lord."

IV

The Day of Resurrection comes with the spring thaw.

Grandmother is not behind other people, the Easter cake whitens like a snowball on the table, with rose coloured eggs around it.

Father Ivan comes with holiday greetings.

"Ah, Fetinya, what a palace you live in."

"I never expected it, father, never expected it. It was the godly saint who got it for me. And I, sinner that I am, I could not find out his holy name."

"It happens, it happens, Fetinya. The ways of the Lord are unknown. Hm . . . Hm . . . Christ is risen. . . "

He chokes suddenly, and becomes as red as a boiled lobster.

"How is it, you accursed blasphemer, that you put a heretic and an Antichrist with the ikons of the saints? Throw him out!"

He stamps his feet like a horse attacked by flies, his eyes are ready to swallow her whole.

"What kind of an Antichrist is he, father? What's the matter with you? Christ be with you! For forty years and more I prayed to all the saints

to save my house and they did not help me, and he the merciful one, listened to me at once. . . ."

"Tfu!"

He spat straight in the face of the saint. . . . Grandmother stood up before the ikons like a setting hen over her brood before a hawk.

"Don't you spit on the holy ikons. . . . And they call you a priest!"

"When you croak, accursed heretic, there will be no Christian burial for you. . . ." And he jumps out of the house like a cork from a bottle of kvas.

"It must be that priests do not love our real protectors," she thinks.

She wipes the visage of the saint with a clean rag and crows like a rooster at dawn:

"Christ is ris-en. . . ."

And her soul is warm—warm, as if it were steaming in a bath. . .

"The Lord be his judge!"

BLACK FRITTERS

PANTELEIMON ROMANOV

WHEN the train was only thirty miles away from Moscow, Katerina could sit still no longer. It seemed to her that she would never reach the place. Her heart beat faster and faster with every mile.

Yesterday she had found out that Andrei, who had worked for the last five years in a Moscow factory, had begun to live with another woman.

He himself had written nothing to her and their relationship had not changed in the least; he still sent her money for the holidays, and now and then a letter. It was said that he was some sort of chairman now and lived well.

Maybe it meant nothing to him to give her the hundred rubles he was sending; he lived on the other four or five hundred with the other woman. The sum of one hundred rubles, which had seemed so large to her before, suddenly became insultingly small.

What should she do when she arrived in Moscow? Break into his place, unmask him on the spot, make a scandal?

Let people see that he was a scoundrel and a cad. . . . She would break the window panes—and with

her bare hands, so that there might be blood. . . . And she would tear the other woman's hair out.

"Oh, Lord, Lord,—what has he done! And all on account of a bit of red ribbon. . . ." It was not so long ago, it seemed, that they had lived happily together, had gone for hay to the meadow by the river in the evenings; the sun would set, the corn-crakes cry in the swamp beyond the river, blurred voices coming from the village through the evening air. She would stand on the wagon, and he, with his shirt collar unbuttoned, with dry, sunbaked hair, with small drops of sweat on his shaven upper lip, would lift the damp, fragrant hay with a pitchfork and throw it up into her hands as she stood on the wagon. Then he would lead the horse to the water, and she would lie on the hay in the wagon, chew a grass-blade, and know that after supper both of them, tired with their work, but happy and lively, would walk barefoot across the yard to the barn to sleep in the fresh hay. Storm would break from a sudden summer cloud, lightning would flare through the cracks in the gates, and the fresh air would smell even more of hay and the fustian of her sarafan.

And now it was all gone.

She felt she was capable of anything.

But when she walked out of the railroad station with a large crowd of people, she was overwhelmed, lost in the great city. What she had wanted to do was to sweep down on him like a tempest, tell him everything, but instead she had to ask how to reach

the street where he lived. She was shown the tram, but when she bought her ticket she forgot to ask where she had to get off, and she sat in the tram until it reached a suburb of the city.

She had to ride back and then walk and ask for the number of the house, for she could not read. She would be told—and she would go, afraid to ask again, and when she did ask she would find that she had passed by the house and would have to retrace her steps.

She walked more and more quickly, thinking that while she was walking they would leave the house.

When she found the place, a house with enormous doors and windows, all the apartments were locked, and she had to knock and ring. And which bell was she to ring, how was she to guess which door was his?

“Auntie, what are you doing here?” a man in an apron, holding a chisel in his hand, asked her.

Katerina told him.

“He isn’t here. He doesn’t live here.”

“What do you mean he doesn’t live here? Good Lord, what am I to do now?”

She had only one ruble with her, tied in a corner of her kerchief. This was not enough for her fare home.

An old woman with a pail appeared from a door under the stairway, and on finding out what was wanted, said that Andrei Nikanorich had moved to the suburbs. Katerina had to take a train to get there.

Katerina was so happy that she had found a clue, that she almost ran out of the doorway. Because she was happy she had forgotten to ask exactly where he was, and so, when she came to the suburb, she knew the street, but not the number of the house.

Evening was approaching, and clouds. She ran from one end of the street to the other, asking and asking, but she could find out nothing. In her hands she had a kerchief with black fritters. She did not remember why she had taken them. She had come to make a scandal, but she had taken a present along, according to custom,—black rye fritters.

She had only eleven kopeks left now. The place was strange, night approached, a wind began to blow. Her face sweaty and bewildered, she ran along the grassy suburban street flanked by pine trees, and waved her hands in desperation, as she held on to the kerchief with the black fritters.

At the moment when she was most bewildered, when she was in the last throes of despair and fear, she turned into a little alley, and saw a familiar crown of dry hair beyond the railing of a fence.

It was he, Andrei. His tunic unbuttoned, he was squatting near a flower bed and digging the ground.

Katerina could only cry:

“Andriushechka, my dear!”

She ran through the garden gate, and when Andrei rose in surprise from the ground, she embraced him and pressed her head to his breast, powerless to hold back her tears.

“Look who’s here! How did you come here?”

Did you fall from heaven?" Andrei asked in amazement and joy.

Katerina could not answer as she wanted to. She said:

"I was very frightened. I thought I would never find you. I looked for you all day. And I had nowhere to go."

And she wept again.

"Why are you crying?"

Conscience-stricken, she wiped her eyes with the back of her hand, and smiled guiltily. Then she suddenly remembered why she had come. But after what had just occurred when she rushed to him as to her salvation and refuge and had wept with joy on his breast, it was impossible to start a scandal and pass from joyful tears to wild outcries.

And then, when she had seen his familiar crown of hair in the garden like a sudden, wonderful image, her heart was filled with a joy which she had never known, not even when they went haying together and slept in the barn.

He had not at all shown what she had expected from him, from a man to whom had come his deserted wife, a woman from the village, in a fustian sarafan, while he was dressed in city clothes and lived in a suburb.

She could not catch the slightest shade of dislike or perturbation in his face or voice. He was placid, the same slightly patronising caress was in his voice, especially when he said:

"Why are you crying? Come, I will tell them to put up the samovar."

He preceded her on the path that led to the new cottage painted a fresh yellow, which stood near the fence among tree stumps.

But on the way he stopped, and cried to a passer-by in a civilian coat:

"Ivan Kuzmich, you must send to the city for the goods to-morrow. I will write you a note."

His manner of speaking to the man, the way in which the man said "all right" in reply, made Katerina feel that he was the old, clever, practical and kind Andrei, and yet at the same time another Andrei, on whom people depended, who arranged and gave orders in this strange, unknown place just as he had done at home. And he did it so simply and quietly, as if it could never be otherwise.

She approached the cottage with a failing heart. Suddenly she would meet the other woman, dressed like a lady, of course. Involuntarily, Katerina glanced at her own holiday sarafan, and felt a hot wave of shame flood her cheeks because of her village clothes.

When they entered a roomy chamber with new pine walls and partitions, the first things she saw were two beds. Her heart began to beat so that her legs grew weak and almost gave way under her, and her throat went dry.

Everything in the room was so unlike the house where she had lived with him. Near a window was a table covered with a newspaper tacked down at

the corners, an inkwell, a pen, a row of books, some papers on a long nail in the wall. Clean city towels near the washstand in the corner.

"Are there no ikons here?" she asked, just to say something.

"No," Andrei answered simply.

He washed his hands, standing with his back to his wife, and wiped them unhurriedly on the clean white towel.

Katerina, sitting uncomfortably on the first chair she had found when she entered, which stood almost in the center of the room, with her bundle in her hands, looked around, and her eyes searched eagerly for signs of the other woman's presence.

Suddenly she saw an old straw hat on the top of a closet. She quickly lowered her eyes so Andrei might not notice that she had seen the hat.

"Well, we are going to drink tea right away," said Andrei, and began to gather up the newspapers and manuscripts from the dining table.

Katerina felt she did not know what to say in order to break the uncomfortable silence. And what was felt most terribly in this silence was that something of which neither of them had said a word still lay between them.

In the old home she would always talk of the same things—of the cow, of the children (there were three of them), of the bad weather.

Now she was trying hard to find something to say to him, but she could find nothing. Suddenly she remembered about their cow, and grew happy.

"Our Lyska calved the other day. It was a fine calf,—just like her."

At the words "our Lyska" she looked involuntarily at the straw hat. With beating heart, she waited for Andrei to speak.

"Just like her?" Andrei echoed mechanically. Still seeming to be engrossed in something, he slowly continued to remove the newspapers from the table and to put them on the bookshelf. Suddenly he looked at his wife with a new expression on his face, as if he had decided to tell her something important.

The terrible moment had arrived.

"Katiusha," said Andrei, looking not at his wife, but out of the window, "I did not write to you because that would not have meant anything. I do not live alone, but with a comrade. A fine, honest girl. She will come from work right away, so don't you hurt her. I never chased after women, the thing came about honestly. That is all. . . ."

Katerina looked at him in silence, without blinking,—only her throat was convulsed as she swallowed hard occasionally.

This was the right moment to jump up, rip the shawl from her head, tear out a handful of her hair, shriek like a madwoman with insult and grief. And then smash the window panes.

Instead, she said quietly, she did not know why:

"And what about me now?"

"You will live as you have always lived," answered Andrei. "I shall send you money, and I shall come to help you with the harvest."

Katerina did not answer. Tears suddenly filled her eyes, fell on her hands. She did not dry her eyes; she wiped the tears from her hands with a sleeve.

"Why should you cry? It will be settled somehow," said Andrei, and glancing out of the window, added: "There she comes now. Her name is Katerina too—Katya. Wipe your eyes. I have told her about you."

Hurriedly, obediently, Katerina wiped her eyes.

She expected to see a large woman with plump elbows and big breast, with a white face, grown fat on the four or five hundred rubles while she, his lawful wife, was drying up, feeding and nursing his children, harvesting wheat in the fields where her arms had become rough and tanned, and her elbows, once round and white, had grown sharp.

And again a burning, jealous hatred surged darkly from her heart to her head. But her eyes suddenly rounded with surprise when a thin, emaciated girl in a white waist, a short blue skirt, and worn tan slippers entered the room. The girl's blond hair was bobbed like a boy's and held in place by a round horn comb.

The girl, a bundle of papers in her hands, stopped short in surprise.

"What did he find in her? She has a chest like a board," thought Katerina.

"Katya, we have a guest," said Andrei, noticing the girl's questioning glance. "Katerinushka is here."

Katya smiled, blushing confusedly, and offered the guest a thin, pale hand.

"I did not guess at once," she said, smiling again, guiltily and yet at the same time kindly. And recovering almost at once, she added: "I suppose you want to eat after your long journey."

"I told the landlady to put up the samovar," said Andrei.

"Good. . . . I just came from work," Katya turned to Katerina. Then for a fleeting moment she looked at herself in a hand mirror which hung on the wall near the towels, fixed her hair, and disappeared behind the partition.

Katerina still sat uncomfortably on the same chair in the middle of the room. She did not know what to say, and how to treat her husband when his wife was there, behind the partition. She spoke against her own will:

"She is small and thin."

"That is nothing. She is a fine, kind person," Andrei answered.

As if suddenly remembering something, Katerina hurriedly unwound her bundle, and took out the black fritters.

"Here, presents. . . ."

And when Katya, with an apron on, and with hands black from charcoal, entered the room, Katerina, still against her will, said to her too, as if ashamed of the black fritters:

"Here, a village present."

Katya blushed again and glanced at Andrei.

"Take them, take them," said the latter, busy with something in a corner. "She is a fine woman."

"Why did you bring them? It's too much, really." And Katya added at once: "But I love them terribly. Are they with buttermilk?"

"With buttermilk, with buttermilk," Katerina answered quickly, overjoyed that the girl knew what buttermilk was.

Later the three of them drank tea together.

"Ivanov was kicked out anyway," Katya said, turning to Andrei. "There was a general meeting, a lot of noise . . ."

"You don't say? It was time long ago," Andrei answered, livening up. He wanted to say something else, but Katya cut him short, and turned to Katerina.

"You have calluses on your palms. I have them on my fingers. I bang all day long on the typewriter."

Katerina also wanted to say something that would interest and enliven Andrei as much as Katya's words about Ivanov had done. She wanted to tell him about her railroad journey and what she had seen, but she did not know how to begin. All that she could say when she looked at Katya, was:

"Our Lyska calved,—our cow. I sat up with her all that night. The calf is just like her."

"I love calves," said Katya.

There was a silence.

"I've got warts on my hands," said Katya suddenly.

Katerina was glad that warts had been mentioned, for she knew of a remedy for them,—some acid. She began at once to tell how they were to be removed, and tried to keep on talking, for fear that she would soon end and have nothing else to speak about.

After supper, which tormented Katerina because she could not manage her knife and fork, dropping now one, now the other, Katya removed the dishes, and Katerina began guessing where they would put her to sleep. They would take her to the neighbor's, she thought, and would stay here by themselves.

This thought raised a dark wave of jealousy and resentment from the bottom of her soul. But Katya brought a folding bed from somewhere and began to put it up in the room.

Katerina, approaching the table and looking at the papers lying on it, said:

"Lord, I can understand nothing. How do you make head or tail of it?"

Before bedtime, Katya sent Andrei out of the room. He put on his cap and went out.

"Now you can lie down," said Katya with the same confused smile, turning to Katerina, and pointed at her own bed in which she had just changed the linen.

Katerina, feeling that she was expected to say something polite, uttered:

"Why should you bother yourself? I can lie down on the floor."

"No, no, why?"

Katerina took off her boots, glad that she had not come in her best shoes. Then she pulled the sarafan off over her head, and ashamed of her coarse village shirt, covered herself hurriedly.

Katya got some acid from a closet, and sitting next to Katerina, applied it amateurishly to her warts with a feather. Katerina showed her how to do it and helped her.

Then Katya undressed. Katerina looked with involuntary, strange, painful curiosity at the bony legs and the thin abdomen. Her eyes grew dark again.

"What tempted him?" She, Katerina, could carry a full barrel of swill to the pigs with her own hands. This girl couldn't even lift a pail of milk.

"Well, are you settled yet?" they heard Andrei's voice outside the door.

"Come in, come in," cried Katya.

Andrei came in, hung his cap on a nail, and looking around the room, sat down on the folding bed. He asked:

"Shall I put out the light?"

"Put it out."

The room was dark. They could hear the bed creak under him when he lay down.

Katerina, blinking now and then, looked into the darkness to the side where Andrei's bed stood, and heavy thoughts crept into her mind about him, about Katya, about Lyska. . . .

Katerina was to go home in the morning. Andrei took her to the station. Katya overtook them when

they were already out of the house, and gave a package to Katerina, saying:

"A present—for the children."

"Why should you bother?"

"But you must," insisted Katya. Then she added: "Maybe you will stay a little longer?"

"I must go home," answered Katerina. She wondered if it were possible that she should leave without speaking to Andrei. But what could she say to him, when Lyska always turned up on her tongue for some reason or other? She was also bothered by the fact that she had only eleven kopeks. Would he give her money himself, or would she have to ask for it?

Andrei, who was walking in silence, suddenly turned to Katya, and said:

"Ivan Kuzmich is going to the city. Go and write a note to the co-operative."

Katya understood that he wished to be alone with his wife, offered her thin hand to Katerina, and wishing her a pleasant journey, walked off. She waved her handkerchief to them from the distance.

Katerina walked at her husband's side on the soft, mossy path between the tall, scattered pine trees, and avoiding the stumps on her way, waited—perhaps he would begin to speak himself about the most important thing between them. They had lived together twelve years. Was it possible they would find nothing to say to each other at such a moment in their lives?

Andrei, on reaching the crossroads from which

he would have to turn back, voiced nothing of what she had expected, but stopped, and said:

"Well. . . . If you need anything, write, and at harvest time I will come to help you."

He gave her two gold pieces, worn at the edges, and kissed her.

Katerina hugged his neck awkwardly with her left arm, holding the gold pieces in her right hand, and kissed him.

"Good-bye. Come and see Lyska."

"Good-bye. I shall come."

She walked away. But after she took several steps she looked around. Andrei still stood in the same place, and she could see that he had left something unsaid, that he was sorry to let her go without telling her something more.

She stopped, her heart sinking, and leaned forward.

Andrei stood for a few moments, as if looking for words, then, waving his hand, cried:

"Take care of Lyska!"

"I will take care of her," Katerina answered, sighing.

Andrei turned in his tracks, and made off.

"They fixed the old woman. They met her with kindly words and sealed her mouth so that she couldn't even move her tongue. In the village people will ask: 'Well, did you fix that good-for-nothing husband of yours? Did you tear the harlot's hair out? Did you smash the windows?' But she—not only had she not broken the window panes

—she had made a present of the black fritters to the other woman. And they had given her two gold pieces and a package for the children. Never fear, the girl is laughing now over her black fritters—even white ones are not good enough for her with her four or five hundred rubles.”

Katerina even stopped, as if ready to return. But she remembered the thin, weak hands of Katya and her confused, caressing smile. Waving her hand in final farewell, Katerina crossed herself, and went her way.

THE OLD WOMAN

LYDIA SEIFULLINA

THE old woman was in the yard when her son came home. She had carried out a bucket for the pigs. She saw him when he was still far away, from the little sty at the gates. She recognised him at once: her own blood. But she did not go to meet him. She straightened up, wiped her hands on her skirt, and looked straight into her son's face.

The son, too, saw her at once with one lift of the eyelid: his mother had grown old. Her back was bent, there was something like a small hump on it. The breasts had dried and fallen in. From underneath the head-shawl the little hair that could be seen was no longer black sprinkled with grey, but all a dull white. The look in the clear grey eyes had not died yet, it was still sharp. As if a hot coal glowed inside. He smiled at that.

"Hello, mother. Why do you meet me so coldly? As if a strange passer-by walked into your yard."

The old woman tightened her thin, colourless lips. She answered unhurriedly and unwillingly:

"We used to welcome strangers, too, once upon a time. We never refused them bread and salt till we were left without anything. You came on leave?"

"Well, yes. I wanted to see my own mother. And it looks as though you won't even let me into the house. I heard you were angry, but I thought, after all, a mother . . ."

"Why not let you in? It's your father's house. He built it for his children, for his family. And you're his own son. Walk in. Maybe you'll chase me out yet."

Antip slapped his side, and laughed.

"Well, and I knew, mother, that you would welcome me this way. But it's nothing, it won't hurt me. I'm not the scary kind. It's not for nothing that I look like you. Mammy baked me into a copy of herself, you might say. But I want a drink. I came from the station on foot, and my throat is burning. What about the samovar—have you still got it or not?"

They were already standing in the house. Antip looked around with cleared and softened gaze at the dark sleeping bunks, the corner with the gloomy faces of the old ikons, the benches and the old homespun cloth on the table. His face became joyfully abashed—as if some spring had weakened in him. It was softer and gentler. But the old woman grew darker, her gaze sharper. She said in an angry voice:

"The comrades didn't take the samovar away yet. But I want you to know this: when you were born, when you were little, you were my own. I fed you, I took care of you. But now that you have turned against your parents, and brought an un-

timely death on your own father, I won't feed you and take care of you, snake. The house is yours. Live in it. But as far as food goes, take care of it yourself. They took away everything. And what I eat I earn myself in my old age. And I won't give it to anybody."

Her anger made her face look younger. Antip threw his soldier's cap on a bench.

"Well, if you talk like that to your own son after not seeing him for five years, I won't bother you. But now give me some tea. I told you my throat was dry. And give me something to eat. I'll pay you for it."

The old woman looked at his wind-beaten face, his dry lips; she heard his deep, tired breathing, and her eyes seemed to grow a trifle softer. She answered thoughtfully.

"All right, if you say so. You'll pay me after, after. I'll put up the samovar now."

But while she attached the chimney and fussed over the samovar, she watched her son out of the corner of her eyes. And her heart was again inflamed with anger and pain. No, my dear, no, sonny, borne and reared by me only to cause me grief and trouble, you won't make your mother think as you do. I have carried my faith with me into my old age. It was not in peace and sweetness that I carried it. It is not for nothing that my back looks like a wheel, and the veins are knotted on my hands, and there is a lingering pain in my bones. But into my old age I have carried my faith: man

must walk in humility before the Lord. Each under his yoke, each in his place. For the muzhik who is a muzhik in bone and flesh, it is written: win your bread by hard work, bear your children and leave them in your place harnessed to the same life that harnessed you. We lived, and we worked. Not without grief, not without pain, but we got somewhere. Not among the first, but not among the last either, of those who were respected in the village for their work. Three sons grew out of our root to live in the service of God. Daughters—well? They work for others. We married them off into other villages. They bring neither profit nor loss. Sometimes they bring the mother's heart cares, sometimes joy. But not for the family, not for the future. She and the old man had laid all their hopes on the sons. God was not pleased. He took the good ones to Himself. One was crushed by a wagon. He was riding home from the mill and was hurled off the seat. Another laid his life down in the Tsar's war. And he left no branch of himself. His wife wasn't good for anything, barren. Now that she had a second husband there were still no children. But to the smallest, to the youngest, they always looked with more hope than to the others. He was sharp and clever. But it seems that she and her old man had sinned before the Lord unforgivably. He punished them with the child from whom they had expected joy in their old age. When the Tsar was removed and murder stalked the whole empire, the boy came home on leave. At the be-

ginning there was nothing wrong. Everybody in the village was satisfied. He knew how to read, his brains were in the right place, he always knew just what a muzhik was supposed to do. The war had bitten into their farm a bit. In addition to the hired band a young, careful owner was needed. The old man suffered from a rupture. His care and his energy were lessening. They thought they could get out of their troubles a little later. But their son, their joy, turned coat,—ruined them. On that leave of absence, when he brought joy to his parents, he had stayed but little. He returned a year later another man, both in blood and brain.

After a bit of hemming and hawing: "I am a Bolshevik," he says. "Why," says he, "do you lean to the other side? You have but little, anyway. There's no use shielding another's barns with your backs."

The father was a humble man at heart. In truth the mother was the head of the family. In the village people laughed:

"If you want anything from Demyan, ask his wife. She wears the pants."

But he was a decent man. He did not like disorder, and was always pious. And the old woman was ardent in her faith. That was the kind of heart she had. She loved prayer, and spent whole nights at it. How many times she asked forgiveness of God because she had not become a nun! When she was a girl, she had been different. In her youth she had shared many sweet and secret sins with her

husband. Nor had she repented. But with old age there came a longing for God. And because of this, although the hurt their son had done them was deep, although he was turning the life they had laid out for him in an altogether different direction, although their attachment to what they had saved and gained was strong, still they could have made peace with him. They had saved for him. Time would pass, and real order would come back into their life, and their son would change his mind. He would begin thinking of his own farm, of his own good instead of the needs of others. It was on account of faith, of loyalty to God that they quarrelled. The son had declared that the Bolsheviks wanted to remove not only the Tsar, but God, too. He insulted his mother:

“What are you howling about? A lot your God has helped you! When you beat your head on the floor in prayer for Petka’s life, did my brother live?”

And with bitter laughter:

“In the whole village you pray and serve God more than any one else and yet Mokey Stepanich, who almost never prays, has an iron roof on his house and everything is all right in his family. He gets away with graft! It seems that your God is like our old district delegate—he likes graft.”

He excited the hot heart of the old woman. She stamped her foot, pointed with awe to an ikon and disowned him.

“You are not my son! I will not burden my soul

with the sin of having a son who is a blasphemer. Go where you will. And don't come back while we're alive."

And like his wife, the old man, too, spoke bitter words to his son.

"We dragged our burdens and waited, and this is what we get in our old age. We can't bear it. It's a sin that can't be washed away with prayers. All of us have always honoured God. We can't live in the same house with you. When I die you're my son and heir. And now God tells me not to suffer you near me. Move back to the city. We'll manage to drag our lives out to the end without children, me and the old woman."

He said this, but when the son left the house, he began to long for him. He grew thin and weak, and could not or would not pay attention to the farm. Whenever he would rise from bed gloomy, the mother knew that he had seen Antipka in his dreams. And they heard about Antip often. Even in the city everybody knew him. The villagers were angry at Antip's parents for the requisitions that the city was making.

"Some son you have. You let loose your own curse on the whole world. It would be all right if only you suffered. But why should we suffer?"

But the poorer inhabitants of the village, grown loud these days, came to them with undesired news.

"They say Comrade Antip is coming here to the village at ploughing time. Everybody says he is a good man, a real man."

But who praised him? Those whom she and her husband liked and with whom they lived at peace turned their heads away. But the loud-voiced, shiftless tenant-farmers, they who weren't rooted in the soil, treated the two old people too much like relatives.

The old man sighed, coughed sorrowfully. He looked at his yard with darkened, tired eyes,—a yard without cattle, with only one horse. He did not even speak of sowing that year. The old woman prayed longer and more passionately than ever.

"Lord Father, merciful God, be not wrathful. Forget the sin of Antipka. Do not punish Antipka's blasphemy. Have mercy.

But God did not forget that sin. He punished without mercy.

The power of the Bolsheviks had come to stay. It was as Antipka had said. And he was held in great honour by the new ring-leaders in the village. They celebrated a new holiday of their own, not godly, not religious. They spoiled more than five yards of red fustian. Just on a new invention of theirs, besides the fustian for the red flags. They fastened the strip of fustian to two sticks and placed it over the steps of the old village meeting room. And on that fustian a newly arrived painter lettered in white paint:

"Long live Karl Marx and Comrade Antip Semakhin!"

That was about Antipka of course. And Antip got some sort of a job for the painter in the city in

return for that. And he had his name printed side by side with the name of the Bolshevik chief. The old people couldn't even pronounce the name of that Bolshevik. And the boys from the richer farms began to make fun of Antip, referring to him as "Karla." They were afraid of the old woman. Although she was old, she was always ready to fight. But they poisoned the life of the quiet old man. Whenever they met him they yelled:

"Mars's pop!"

The old man buried his head deeper in his shoulders.

He hurried home. He was ashamed and stopped walking in the street. He could hardly make ends meet on his farm. But when requisitions were being made, he suddenly became active.

"We have to hide it. Let us save a little bit if we can. We've lost enough as it is."

And he added quietly, with fear and longing:

"Maybe Antip himself will need it sometime."

He stopped and waited for an answer. But the old woman did not say a word.

He hid things. And the people who helped him were the first to betray him. That was to pay back Antip in his own coin. The old man was taken to the city. And there, from fear or longing, he met his end. He did not return. And it was his dear son who had dragged him into the grave. Maybe he would have lived longer if it was not for that hidden property. . . . And now his son is sitting at the table and waiting to be fed. And without a thought

or a care for his father. He didn't even ask anything, he didn't even say he was sorry. And he sits there under the ikons, in his hat, like an infidel. It was on his account that God was angry with them. That everything was ruined. All that was left for her old age was anger and grief. She became mad. Her burning eyes moved from her son to the ikon. Her heart was lost in a secret and passionate prayer.

"Do not remember, oh Lord. Give him rest after death at least. Let him into the heavenly kingdom. Don't let him be tortured in hell."

And she looked at her son as if he were her deadly enemy. She gave him to eat in snatches. He looked back at her with a quiet, thoughtful look, and said:

"You are not forgiving, mother. You'll never give up what your heart is set on. Well, and I am just like that, too. Neither your anger nor your talk will move me. We couldn't live in the same house. All right, you gave me to eat; now I am going. I'll find another place to live. How much did you say you wanted for the meal?"

His mother looked at him angrily. But her voice was quiet when she said:

"I'm not going to lose anything on you. You ate eggs and bread, and drank milk. I'll count up right now what it amounts to in your city prices."

Dryly and stonily she named the price. Then she added:

"And I must say that I don't know what to do with your paper money. Even if I get it, it will not

mean that I was paid. You've brought things to such a pass that even money means nothing."

Antip smiled bitterly.

"I will give you a shirt. I have a clean one in my knapsack. You may as well rip the shirt off your own son, once things have come to such a pass."

She took the shirt quietly. She smoothed it out, folded it carefully, and put it in a trunk.

Antip rose, coughed, and said hollowly:

"Well, all right. Meanwhile good-bye."

He walked quietly to the door. Then he stopped and looked at his mother again. Her face seemed to be made of stone. Two pairs of eyes, very much like each other, met. The old woman was the first to drop hers. She said dryly:

"Good-bye."

The son pressed his lips tightly together, as if his teeth hurt him. This made him resemble his mother even more. He looked older, more severe. Then he turned, and walked out.

That night bitterness gripped her heart. She had driven out her own son. Maybe they would never see each other again. For a long time she bent before the ikons, and her thoughts hardened.

"The holy saints suffered greater grief than this for the sake of God."

Her son did not come to the village again. But in his wanderings he took a girl with him. Lawlessly. Again there was much talk and humiliation. But the old woman soon stopped it.

"I have no son. That infidel is no son of mine.

I disown him. And don't bother me with talk about him."

After another year the Cossacks came into power in that countryside. They returned and took the place of the Bolsheviks. The old woman heard rumours:

"It seems that Antipka has been killed, or he is hiding somewhere. They say he got caught. But it looks more as if he is killed. His woman, Dunka Voroshilova, was dragged through prison. They let her out now, she lives in the city."

This time the old woman did not drive out the rumour-monger. She moved her shawl lower on her forehead, and asked in a subdued voice:

"Is the woman with child or not?"

"They say he left her with child. They say she lives badly. She is paying for others' tears."

But the old woman cut the talk short:

"I must go to Marya to receive her child. They called me. Well, it is work. Nowadays children don't feed their parents, and strangers won't do it for nothing. I need food and I have no time for talk."

And she walked out of the house.

But from that day it seemed that she was melting away. After a week she got ready to go to the city. She even prepared a stick for her journey, but illness swept her off her feet. Toward death she seemed to become milder. She said to Marya, the soldier's wife, who ran in to see her:

"I suppose I've got a grandson born in the city

now. I wanted to see him. But God did not wish it. I suppose He hasn't pardoned Antipka. Well, I suppose it will be as the All-merciful commands it."

And suddenly she began to sob pitifully, like a child. Marya was astonished. The old woman had been strong. She showed her tears only when custom demanded it. And now there she lay bawling. Just before death. Two days later the end came.

THE LAW OF THE WOLF

BORIS PILNIAK

I

SHELVES of books are like the shelves of years. There is a time in the life of every human being when the work of his years is ended: then the human being is taken to the Novo-Devichy Monastery and buried in the ground, his corpse yielded to the slow labour of worms,—or it is taken to the Don Monastery and burned in a crematorium. In the crematorium the human being experiences the final human agony. In the furnace of the crematorium, at a temperature of two thousand degrees Reaumur, it takes two minutes for the coffin and the clothes of the dead to become ashes, and only the naked corpse remains;—and this naked corpse begins to move, its legs bend under it, its hands creep up to its neck, its head is sucked in between the shoulders. If at the window through which one can see how two thousand degrees Reaumur destroy a man there should stand a living person with shattered nerves, the hair of this living person would become grey, and the last human agony of the corpse would appear to him metaphysical and in violation of death.—The shelves of the years of human life—are like books; for every book—is it not a human agony, an

agony of human genius and human thought which has violated the laws of death, which has stepped beyond death, just like the agony of the crematorium?—and at times the man who loves books, must—oh, he must,—at night, in his study, among the shelves of his books,—he must be struck with horror in the face of those books, he must feel that each book is a replica of real human life, that each book is an agony of thought which deceives death,—he must feel horror, and sense that here, in the night, when the great jaws of the books gape from the shelves, the gold of their teeth shining in gums of mahogany, when the head is tired and overwhelmed by the yardstick of night,—he must feel horror, and sense that this room and these books are the essence of death, a morgue where real life is buried, dead replicas of living thoughts, human agonies like those of the crematorium. From that shelf creep down the thoughts of Johann Wolfgang Goethe, the image of a Werther who has never lived. Lessing, Hegel, Buechner—published by Uhlsteir. Uhland, Wieland, Spielhagen—the friends of youth, the heroes of youth. Karl Moor cannot conquer the bitter smile of Heine. All this has remained in long-past, pre-Octobrian epochs. Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Bukharin,—the history of the development of socialism, the history of the development of the labour movement in Germany, Austria, Hungary, Russia, the world—this has become the epoch of to-day, of October. Lenin is dead, but his books are growing and growing. And it is very lonely for a man in the

night amidst the silence of the dead, because men always have two lives,—the life given by the brain, duty, honour, by the open shutters of the conscious,—and another life, given by the subconscious, instinct, the sun, the blood.

Nights when books become the corpses of a crematorium do not pass in vain for man.

He lay in his study on a leather couch beneath the bookshelves. It was the immovable hour of midnight. The window shades were lowered. He could not see the books physically,—but he saw them. He did not know whether he slept or was awake, but he sensed his brain and his thoughts physically. He saw the brain as he had seen it in morgues—two lobes of raw meat. Over the left ear, near the pillow, under the skull, was born a thought, and this thought ran upward like a mouse, fumbling along the convolutions, physically scratching them,—it stopped under the forehead, in the regions of the conscious, and formed:—"To-morrow I must be in the Comintern."—The subconscious enfolded the lobes of the brain like the two opaque shades that cover the lights in railway sleepers. Only a little slit was left for the conscious. These shades could be moved apart by an effort of the will. The will wanted these shades to be closed altogether, for it was necessary to sleep, and it was very quiet, warm, restful and comfortable behind the shades. But in spite of the will, thoughts from the slit of the conscious still ran into the murk of the brains, and the conscious followed, watching them. With instantane-

ous agility thought ran into memory, into one, into another, the two memories united and returned to the conscious at that moment when from the very remotest places, from the base of the brain, came a vision—this vision was bound by the memories, the first and the second:—it was the shoulder of his first wife as it had lain near him before and as he had seen it for the last time when he had bidden her farewell.—In the murk of the subconscious it was very warm, restful and quiet. The conscious felt that there was not a single thought in the brains, the brains had gone to sleep,—it had the strength to hold back, to put in place, not to allow a single thought to move. And then the door leading to his wife's room squeaked. His eyes were closed, he could not see physically. But he saw his wife, his second wife, Maria, open the door, stand on the threshold for a while and then go to the desk, sit down near it, and let her shoulders sag. She was in white *négligée*. Her eyes were closed. Her hair was tied for the night with a twisted handkerchief. She sat down near the desk and let her shoulders sag, strengthless,—and at her side stood the heavy-shouldered Felix. The conscious established:—his wife, the second.—And then from the subconscious there ran at once by the hundreds, not thoughts, but sensations, and the entire subconscious, the brains, the body, felt an unbelievable heaviness, straitness, pain,—not physical, but of a nature that makes men's hair turn grey. The books, like the crematoriums,—thoughts like corpses,—Felix like thoughts,—his

wife like a corpse—not in the crematorium, but in the Novo-Devichy, where human bodies are given over to the worms,—the subconscious, like a corpse in the Novo-Devichy. Körner, Weber, Marx.—The conscious moved the shades apart—energetically—along the whole brain:—"nightmares again!"—night, the empty room, silence, the shades are lowered, no one.

"Maria! Victoria!"

Silence, no one.—"I have to get these books out of here, the place is really like a tomb, I can smell the book maggots."—Silence, no one, nothing. The conscious moves the shades together. In the subconscious it is very restful, warm, quiet. The last mouse of thought runs by, scratching the brain."—"My wife, this second one, is like the books."—Not another thought. The man sleeps. The face of the man is quiet. It grows lighter. A black lock of hair, singed with a grey premature for thirty-six years, falls over his forehead. The lips of this very handsome man twitch in sleep. Things are done in sleep whose course it is impossible to follow. Perhaps the heavy-shouldered Felix, who has become as terrible as the morgue, is not terrible within the dream; the subconscious sees him in the distance, in friendship, when they were like brothers.

The night passes. At dawn this man will rise from the couch, and move with light gait to the window-shades to see the day. His eyebrows will meet when he sees the battlements of the Kremlin,—the light will interfere with his vision.—In the grave-

yard of the Novo-Devichy Monastery the worms eat the corpses not only at night, but in the day, in the gloom of the earth, the coffin, and the body.

II

Felix had a Russian wife, who was able to establish European customs in his home because she was possessed of the greatest strength of woman—to be strengthless. One night at the front, Felix sat at a telegraph instrument in the headquarters of a ruined factory town in the Donbass, alone in the empty midnight, with the November wind and artillery fire in the distance. He did not sleep, waiting for orders. And a girl with dead eyes, her hand near her lips that no one might hear, came to him as he sat near the instrument in the office. She told him that she was the daughter of the factory engineer, that her father and mother had been killed a week ago in that same house, that the house had been her father's, that it had been the headquarters of the Whites, and that she had been hiding all week in the pantry. Her eyes were dead. She said to Felix, sitting down, strengthless, opposite him:

“Kill me too, if you want to. There is nothing left for me to do.”

Felix ordered her to live in the room at the side of the office; in his room, which only he ever entered. She rose obediently from the chair and went to sleep. Next day at twilight Felix saw the girl walk over silently to the piano which stood in his room, sit

down quietly, and begin to play, pressing on the soft pedal. It was then that she first smiled, guiltily, seeing Felix, and closed the piano-top. She was a quiet, wheat-haired girl, who knew nothing of life, and whose blue eyes wondered at the world. She became the wife of Felix. He took her from the blood pools of the front, as one takes an unnecessary kitten by the nape of the neck from a swill hole. The life of Felix lay in his work. Felix was her first husband, and Felix never asked her if she loved him. The years passed. This girl, because of the greatest strength of woman—strengthlessness—was able to create for Felix an un-Russian quiet in his home, those three rooms of a soldier of the Revolution; she had an abundance of flowers and an aquarium in the bedroom so that there might be the necessary humidity for the asthmatic lungs of Felix. She managed to establish a severe chill in the rooms and in the light of the rooms,—daylight in the day and electricity at night. Felix was working for the Revolution, a man of athletic strength and youth, whose strength had been sapped by asthma, tuberculosis, the bayonets of the Revolution, and shrapnel which had exploded near his feet on the Matsievskaya Station, when he was in the Civil War. In the bedroom of Felix hung a list written in his own hand, containing the names of the thirteen diseases from which he suffered. The rooms of Felix were the rooms of a soldier, where everything was as spick and span as the lock of a Mauser. Her room was the bedroom, there stood her piano, there she played the classic

composers, and lived with her friend, a huge dog, a mixture of a shepherd and a wolf.

The days rose in those years, heavy millstones of the Revolution, and grew into the leaden clouds of Moscow squares, the roar of automobiles and the will of the Revolution that commanded the movements of the multitude. These were the week-days. Very rarely, for at times the springs of the years of Military Communism slipped from the gear teeth of the will and beat against overstrained nerves, Felix would ring up his friend Edgar Zadeka and other friends with a short:

"Come here. At once. We are going. Hunting."

Edgar knew then that the springs were loose, that the military coat of Felix was unbuttoned.

The freed springs of the nerves knew how to be loose. The automobiles tore at crazy speed into the chapels of Iverskaya and Varvarskaya, breaking the necks of men. They bathed in seas of night and vodka. Forest guardhouses exploded as if they were grenades. Outlying estates were noisy with the wolfhunt. The hearts of men beat in alcohol as fish beat in nets when lifted from the water. Men walked into the dawning silence of the forests to listen to themselves and the forests and to shoot at Mother Nature, their wills ungirdled. If women entered into those days of wild abandon, of alcohol to the neck, these women became the prey of naked instincts. The forests and the nights were transformed into the agonies of forests and nights. The

oversmoked brains revaluated everything, memory sewed together pieces of life that were decades in time from each other, as well as those that were separated by a minute torn by alcohol.

Every living being has the right to live,—and every living being—has the right to love, perhaps—or is it possible that he has not that right?—Maria, the wife of Felix, possessed the greatest strength of women—to be strengthless. She was afraid to be in Moscow, in the enormous city of the Revolution, where the music of Beethoven was overwhelmed by the music of the Revolution and soldiers' marches, where instead of the warmth of Russianized Dutch stoves one heard the beating of the little hammers of the calorimotor, and instead of lagging kerosene there shone the most energetic chill of electricity. Nevertheless, she played the classic composers and read the Soviet writers, that unusual chapter of Russian literature when the words dignity, nobility and honour disappeared from literature.—There was one night of loosened nerves. The landowner's house, uninhabited for a long time, groaned with the September wind. There was still a table in the parlour, but there were no chairs, the candles were stuck into empty bottles. The table dripped with the incomprehensibilities of alcohol. People drank around the table, their words and their shadows on the wall like some fairy tale from Hoffman. Alcohol moved together—and moved apart—all spaces and all times. A squeaky stairway led from the parlour to the mezzanine. Edgar Zadeka mounted the squeaky

steps,—and Edgar did not remember later whether it was in the evening or at dawn that the yellow, wizened light came down beyond the dusty windows, beyond the park, beyond the river. He put his bottle and his glass on the window sill. Near the window stood a man of the sort whose eyes can look into space so that they see not space but that which lies beyond space. A black lock of hair fell on his forehead. Such eyes, returning from beyond space, must be very active; the black eyes of a Magyar which retained in themselves the mysterious history of his people that had come from the unknown and settled on the old civilisations of the Danube.—They were not thoughts that came to Edgar from these superspaces, but sensations—sadnesses that brought physical pain to his head,—or joys, physical joys that made the spine numb. Edgar knew that this sadness, when death itself entered the head, and this joy, when the sun itself entered the heart, grew in him as he thought of woman, of the wonderful feminine which is spread throughout the human world.—In the room, where you could touch the ceiling with the hand, squeaked the spring of a faded couch.

“Who is there?” asked Edgar.

“I,” answered Maria. “You know, Edgar, I am altogether drunk.”

Then into the heart of Edgar entered that joy from which the spine becomes numb and the sun itself enters the heart.—“I am very sad, Edgar,—I feel very lonely,—sometimes I am very much fright-

ened, because I am all, all alone in the whole world." Oversmoked brains can reevaluate everything, the memory sews together pieces that are decades or minutes apart from each other,—and then very often there arises a sensation of unbelievable purity, virginity, truth which is like an untruth risen above all truths.—"Edgar, I came here to be away from everybody, and you also came here,—how strange! I was just thinking of you. Sometimes it seems to me that I love you, that you are wonderful, powerful, hard like tempered steel,—I have thought much of you. . . ."

Edgar did not remember whether it was in the evening or at dawn that the yellow, wizened light came down beyond the dusty windows of the mezzanine, beyond the park, beyond the river.—Felix stood at the table when Edgar came down. The rest slept, having fallen under the table and in the corners of the parlour on straw. The candles were glimmering their last.

"Let us drink to friendship, Edgar!" said Felix.

Felix lowered his hands and his eyes—and Edgar answered, raising an empty glass:

"Yes, let us drink!—to the bottom!"

"But fill your glass," said Felix.—"Your glass is empty!"

Beyond the window was the wizened dawn.

III

They were men of the great epoch of the Russian Revolution, and born of it, these two friends, Felix

Krantz and Edgar Zadeka. They were not Russian, for the Russian Revolution was international. Felix was an Austrian German, Edgar an Austrian Magyar. They both considered Russia their motherland because Russia had saved them and given them life, and they wanted to rule the world from the Kremlin of Moscow. They spoke a bad Russian, these two commanders of revolutionary Russian regiments, for they had learned to speak it in the thunder of the Civil War,—but they thought in Russian. They were two worthy people, two Europeans, two men that had retained the European manner of attention, politeness, cleanliness, and accuracy. They had both been fated to a hard life, the Austrian officer and the Budapest *littérateur*. Breaking through famine and the bayonets of war and revolution, they had to pass through the forest of not understanding Russia, the Russian language, customs, habits, abandon, books and traditions. They both knew that the life of each of them lay—the life of Felix in the pocket of his tunic, the life of Edgar in the pocket of his vest. Both were physically handsome, both had eyes that were made not to encourage creativeness, but action. Their beauty was the beauty of two different anthropological types. Felix had heavy, hanging shoulders, and the gait of his wounded feet was just as heavy. He was handsome with the beauty of irregularities, wrinkles on the forehead, eyes sunk deep in their sockets, German cheek bones in the red wreath of colour, the straight parting of potato-coloured hair. Edgar had in him the blood of the

Danube steppes through which had passed the feet of many peoples, Huns, Goths, and Magyars, and his hair fell away from his broad forehead, thrown back by the winds of centuries, so that he might the more easily retain the freedom and the pride of his glance, for it always seemed that Edgar had exposed his head and his breast to the strong winds,—he carried his head and breast that way.

In Moscow, after they had come back from the front, a closed automobile stood at the doorstep of each at eight in the morning, and these automobiles carried them to the millstones of the Revolution, to those heavy millstones over which ran the water of history and thought;—and they were the millers that attended the millstones which ground history, time, men and strength. These millstones had many levers, and history flowed in a flood of many waters, and the closed automobiles carried the two men along the Moscow streets and squares, from the Lubyanskaya to the Ilyinka, from the Ilyinka to the Kremlin, from the Kremlin to the Old Square. Felix was sent by the Revolution to act. Edgar was sent by the Revolution to think of the Revolution and for the Revolution of its ways, its time, its ideas and morals. In the over-exertion of the millstones the automobiles ended their days near the doorsteps which they had left at eight in the morning, in the deep hours of the night. The tunic of Felix was the most ordinary of tunics,—the coat of Edgar was the most ordinary of coats; the coat and the tunic seemed to be made not of cheviot and cloth, but of leather

which was as strong as the skin on the cheek bones of these men made tough near the millstones of the Revolution. The tunic and the coat could be removed only at midnight. These two men had to carry their time like pitchers of water filled to the brim, from which they dared not spill a single drop. Brains and time filled the pitchers of their lives, and their lives were all for action.

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In human life there is unsensed sunlight, given by the blood!—

In the house of Edgar Zadeka, which belonged to the government, there were very thick walls which disappeared into the arches of the ceilings. The house was overgrown with silence. The walls of the study were overgrown with books. The sunlight came into the dining room through the arches of the windows, but the books had invaded the dining room also. And from behind the books in the dining room rose his five-year-old daughter, Alissa, Lissa for short,—rose from behind the books together with the sunlight in the disorder of questions and caresses,—

the father read a newspaper, near a glass of tea, and the daughter climbed to his knees and stayed there as quiet as a kitten, without disturbing his application to the newspaper, and then asked him, sunk in thought:

“Papa, are we living, or are we playing?”

Her father did not understand, the print in the

paper having become confused with his daughter's question, and said:

"What do you mean, Lissa?"

"Are we living, or are we playing?—you and mama—you are living and I and my friend Natasha Gerbeck,—we are playing dolls. The dolls are not alive, they are made of rags and their heads are sold at the store. And you play with us.—I and Natasha—are we living, or are we playing?"—

And the daughter's question put in the shade all of the print in the newspaper,—the first unstudied thought of the daughter—and the father was lost in his answer, his whole brain and heart conceiving how dear to him was his daughter, his flesh,—and the father pressed the child to himself so strongly that tears of physical pain and moral perplexity appeared in her eyes—

And from behind the books, together with Lissa, following Lissa with her laughter and her little hands that were as agile as holiday see-saws on a wheel, came his wife, her mother, his friend,—a woman who had first appeared in his life—together with his youth—in Budapest, who had passed with him through years of famine and the bayonets of the Revolution, making her way together with him through not understanding Russia, through the forests of the Russian language, customs and habits, so as not to drown in Russian abandon. This woman had walked with him—her woman's path—from the eyes that had first closed with passion to the first wrinkles of the years around the eyes. She spoke

Russian worse than Edgar, she thought in her own native language,—and she had great silences, this proud woman, mother, friend and defender of the home and the books,— this quiet, slow woman who knew that human passions are black and singeing like brands from a Russian fire, and who was able to suppress them in herself as she had been taught to do by the black mediævalism of Budapest. On the front of the Russian Revolution, at the Matsiyevskaya station, a grenade had exploded near the feet of Felix. There were three of them in the guard-room then, she, Felix, and Edgar: a piece had hit her in the shoulder. She took the piece out with her fingers from the flesh of the wound, wrinkling her lips with pain, moving her brows together, but still smiling.

Lissa appeared in the mornings. The mother, the wife Victoria, came in the night, with a candle in her hands, dressed in black. The midnight Russian tea was always cold, and the books in the study smelled of maggots. The wife would sit down on the couch, at the side of her husband. She would say:

Weisst du, ich denke, dass Ruth Fischer hat kein Recht—

The candle on the table was the candle of Faust, the midnight rested in its immovability. And the husband and wife spoke of what was a hundred times more majestic than Goethe,—of the Revolution in the world, of that Revolution which poured history over its millstones—there beyond this stone house, beyond these hours of wife and husband when the

husband removed his cheviot coat which had become one of leather in order to drown time in his books and in his wife,—for the flat rectangles of books have the quality of throwing human thought into whatever times and distances one wills, like a *camera obscura*,—and the voice, the hair, the head, the shoulders, the breast of his wife, her words, her warmth, her caresses—can force the man to take his own heart in the palm of his hand and hide his whole being in that heart when silence and that wonderful thing which had given life to the redhaired Lissa ruled about him. In the midnights when his wife fell asleep,—that proud, quiet woman, the sister of the Revolution,—and the candle was out, the books lost themselves in the gloom,—then he, if he did not sleep, thought of the great world, of the great marches which he had made in his days—he supported his head on his elbow, and in the gloom at his side barely whitened the shoulder of his wife, wounded at Matsiyevskaya,—of the woman who always wore black in the day, and who was the only one in his life. This was the mystery of love. This was the pitcher which one could not spill, any more than one could spill the pitcher of the Revolution.

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Once a week, or once in two weeks, or a month, when they had a free hour or a free night, Felix came to see Edgar, or Edgar went to see Felix—to fulfil the laws of friendship, to touch not wineglass to wineglass, but soul to soul, thought to thought.

The heavy-shouldered Felix would walk about in

the rooms, his soldier's eye looking around at the corners, the arches of the ceiling, jests and sententiousness mixed on his lips:

"There is dampness on the ceiling, the windows leak, you don't take care of your health—"

"Show me how to close the stove, it must be closed—"

"Vitya, turn up your eyelids, you are poor-blooded—"

Then Felix would sit down on the couch in the study, not to move from the place for hours. From behind the bookshelves would appear a secret bottle of plum brandy. Edgar knew every gesture of Felix. Felix knew every gesture of Edgar. Felix filled the glasses with the brandy, and jested. And after the fifth glass these people would begin to touch soul to soul, so that Edgar, Felix and Victoria might examine themselves, their affairs, their thoughts. The books were removed from the desk, candles appeared in great quantities, and a taboret with a plate was placed near Felix. Victoria was silent, in the warmth of an Angora shawl. Felix leaned with one hand on Edgar's knee in order to lighten the burden of his shoulders. And Felix handed the boulders of his thoughts to Edgar and Victoria.

"Turn your attention," Felix would say, "to Comrade Moses in the Bible, who led the Jews out of Egypt. He was not a foolish muzhik. He walked on the bottom of the sea, made heavenly manna out of nothing, got lost in the deserts, arranged conven-

tions of soviets and receptions on Sinai. For forty years he searched and fought for a place to live. And yet he did not reach the promised land, leaving it for Joshua to stop the sun. This is not at all a foolish Biblical story, for old man Moses could not reach the promised land on account of logic. People who knew Sodom cannot live in Israel; they are not fit for the promised land, because they remember that there is such a thing as a *Schutzmann*, the kind of a moustache he has, the kind of a bust the *Frau Schutzmann* has. The old man had to lay his bones down for the new generation, for only the new generation which has not known the *Schutzmann* is fit for the promised land. I am thinking now that we are working like Moses, we have walked on the bottom of the sea and we have stopped eating heavenly manna,—but you and I are not fit for the new life; we are not fit for it,—but your Redhead will live it. I remember how the majors used to beat the soldiers of the Landsturm. We are nothing but Moseses.”

Edgar took all the poison of thought and used it for the Revolution for which he lived. Felix spoke quietly, slowly,—a heavy-shouldered man. The candles burned as they had burned for Goethe. The bookshelves were quiet with the backs of books entering into human knowledge and time. Edgar knew the pathos of words which Felix did not know.

“Yes, but Moses and Lenin wrote the tables of the law. We are to live. We are to write the tables of the law for the future, the tables which must be washed in our blood. We are rather sceptical

people, and we know the sauce that is used for baking those tables of the law,—you and I, we shot people in the back,—that was the roundabout way. This sauce must be unknown in the new life, just as it was understood in the promised land that Baal and the affairs of the wife of Potiphar were to be forgotten. We must live—the lives of heroes.”

And then the thoughts of Felix and Edgar would begin to roam over the cities and the plains of Russia, near the mines and the miners of England, along the valley of the Yang-Tse, the great river of China, near the concerns of Stinnes and around the hypocrisy of Churchill—there where fires were to flare up at which and by which the tables of the future were to be fed.—These pitchers were not to be spilled.—These tenders of the millstones of the Revolution had their week-days also, with superiors and inferiors and colleagues, and indifferent acquaintances and enemies, and successes and failures,—and in these hours of the candles of Goethe and the restfulness of the bookish rooms, Edgar and Felix, touching thought to thought, spoke of all their week-days, of yesterday and the day before that, which made their circle and their public opinion. So burned the candles, given birth by Goethe, until the hour when Felix arose to walk through the silence of the house down to the entrance. Near the entrance the two brothers kissed each other, and an automobile would disappear in the darkness. There remained the hour of the wife and the husband.

IV

The epoch of the October Revolution rebuilt sex morals and freed the family economically. In the human world monogamy is not a biological law. Edgar was tied forever to Victoria, who had passed with him all the forests of his wanderings, and who had borne him his daughter, the redhaired Lissa, his love and his future,—but Edgar was not physically true to his wife, just as many other men of that epoch, as well as many women. In railroad cars, on railroad ties, in chance cities, on chance nights were his women, who had burdened him with no responsibilities, who gave him the joy that made the sunlight enter into his heart with the eternal feminine which Edgar touched through them. The pitchers of the Revolution left no brains for the eternal feminine.

All was justified by the morals of week-days. There were two lives: the first life and the second life. In the woods the wolves have secret paths, unnoticeable dens, waymarks, signs, guideposts. From the first life, that of the millstones of the Revolution, the *camera obscura* of books and the customs of the home, from the habits of friendships—Edgar excluded himself into the second life. In the hundreds of everyday workaday telephone calls, there was one call about an hour and a place. Edgar stopped the automobile at a chance corner and—sank into the second life, into mystery, into that which no one knew and where joy was everything and justified everything. In secret love there

are no week-days of tiredness, rubles, back-yards of character—and much is justified by people because everything is done in secret, because it is unknown to anybody, for that which is hidden by mystery justifies very many immoralities. In large cities there are mysterious paths, unnoticeable signposts and waymarks, and places of meeting hidden from common sight. Here in the hours excluded from affairs and time into the second life, there was only the joy of woman. He saw her path by secret signposts. That path to her was filled with the things that benumb the heart. The palm of a woman, placed over a man's eyes, can cover the entire world—not only from his vision, according to the laws of physics,—but it can cover the world so that the palm becomes greater than the world,—and the bared knee of a woman can be colder, more majestic and higher than the peaks of Mont Blanc. She went to meet him,—Maria,—carrying all that was beautiful in her, so that she might give it to him. She loved, sinking her love into the rhythms of the classical composers, not justifying it, not thinking of justifying it. She hid her head in the breast of Edgar, to be closer to that breast, to listen to happiness and ask no questions when she heard his heart. Her palms and all of her were in his palms. Every man knows the joy in the possession of a woman,—and every human being knows the greater joy in the possession of a human soul, of all its intentions and all its thoughts which are here, on the palm of the hand. These hours, excluded from

time, were either at ten in the morning, or at ten at night, or at four in the afternoon,—and the secret paths led to the home of Felix, or the home of Edgar, or the empty room of a third friend, or a sleeping-car on the railroad, all chosen with various cunning. These hours of the secret paths passed swiftly. When they were over, after the last kiss, after the last tender word, then, beyond the front entrance and the crossroads of an alley—the second life—was included into the first life, the life of affairs, cares, and action. Beyond the crossroads of the alley one could return to the home of Felix and greet Maria Nikolaievna, an altogether strange woman, ask about her health and convey regards from his wife,—for in human actions secret affairs are often not weighed in the scales of morals. Beyond the alley, the shoulders were harnessed into the affairs of the real, first life, for the city squares opened in leaden clouds of action and will, where it was impossible to differentiate between the pitchers of the brains, and one had to command his thoughts. At the millstones of the Revolution arose a man whose cheek bones had become tough in the winds of history, when the cheviot of his coat became leather. The wolf paths were dismissed from the mind. At home, from behind the books, appeared the redhaired Lissa.

V

The eyes of Felix were given him to give birth to action. The eyes of Edgar, when they returned

from beyond the spaces, were also such as to give birth to action. The two men lived to act, and to die for what they did.

Hunters in the woods stalk wolves. The beaters trace the wolves' footprints. Then the hunters follow the wolf-paths and surround the thickets with nets. The forest is quiet, silent, in the grip of autumn. The criers begin to howl and yell in the silence of the woods, to raise the wolf and drive him along the paths surrounded by the hunters and the nets. The life of the wolf becomes death.

In the morning Lissa came into Edgar's cavern of books. She dragged a doll over the floor by one leg. Edgar sat his daughter down on the table among the books.

"Papa, you told me you live with mama like I and Natasha. We live with life. And my doll Milka—she lives?" asked Lissa, and smiled slyly. "Tell me a story."

Edgar could not successfully explain why the doll did not live. Lissa became bored. Edgar told her how the bear chopped down the branch on which he was sitting.

"Mama tells stories better than you," said Lissa.

"No, my stories are better," Edgar answered.

"Yes," said Lissa, "only mama's stories are with pictures, and in your stories I don't even see how the bear chops the branch and falls. Mama has pictures of everything in her book."

Lissa sat on the table in front of Edgar, grew into the books and grew out of them, little, red-

haired, happy Lissa. Edgar played with her, she spread her fingers to make a terrible pair of shears of them, and swung her legs, imagining they were a tongue. She rode into the dining room on the shoulders of her father, so that he might have his coffee. While drinking coffee father and daughter played ball.

At midday, from the office on whose walls hung maps of the world, the right corner of whose table was loaded with telephones, against the table, against the armchair of which stood a lonely chair, —from the empty office, severe like a barracks, the telephone wires carried the words of Felix.

To Maria:

"Maria, you will come here in a quarter of an hour, on important business."

To Edgar:

"Edgar, you will come here at once, on important business. I want you here very much. In the office."

Maria sat down on the chair opposite Felix. They waited a minute for Edgar. Edgar entered eagerly. There was no chair for him. Felix began to take the receivers off the telephone instruments, then he opened a fresh package of cigarettes, took one, offered them to Edgar.

"Let us smoke. Sit down, there, on the window sill, Edgar," said Felix and pulled long at his cigarette.

Edgar looked very attentively at Felix, retreated to the window, and sat down on the sill. Maria

was at peace. Felix was sucking at his cigarette.

"Well, what will you tell me, Edgar?" asked Felix.

"About what?" responded Edgar.

Felix lowered his head. The wrinkle between his brows tightened gloomily.

"I would like to know about the relationship that exists between you and Maria, and about which you have both been silent," said Felix.

The eyes of Edgar grew ready for action. He crossed the room on a diagonal and stopped at the table. Maria rose from her chair. Rain dripped beyond the windows. The Venetian glass filled the room with shadowless, nickel-colored light. In tragic minutes human beings make very few gestures.

"You are silent?" said Felix, and raised his head. "Good. I called you for the following reason. There is a provincial habit of writing diaries. Last year, on the eighth of September, one year and one week ago, you, Maria my wife, and you, Edgar, my friend, on the Soviet estate Porechye—you betrayed me. I am not the owner of human souls. I have had my adventures, and I recognise the right of every one to them. But it is nine months that I read those diaries. I dissembled as if I knew nothing, thinking that it was a passion that would pass in time, or of which you would tell me if it were serious. You, Edgar, wanted to touch empty glasses with me—but you are my friend, Edgar. We are building a new world and new morals. A year has passed since that time, and I am still talking to you.

The year has shown me that it was not a momentary passion. I do not consider polygamy Communist morals, but I consider it the duty of a Communist to be honest in his dealings with Communists. But what I propose now is not debate, but action. You understand, Edgar, that my heart has grown away from you,—but you also understand that I can not permit the violation of my wife. I propose that you marry without any unnecessary lies. I will insist on this as the natural outcome of things. Here, Maria, is the key of our house. I am going to a sanatorium for a month. I hope that the month will give you enough time to settle. Farewell. Go. The best of luck."

Maria sat down on the chair, having heard the sentence. Edgar did not move a single muscle so as not to lose a word of what Felix said. His eyes became sharp like the eyes of his nomad forbears watching an enemy in the steppes. Felix began to hang the telephone receivers, and the telephone rang at once.

"Yes," said Felix. "This is Krantz. I cannot receive any one. Yes, I am going to a sanatorium. No. Yes. I have just separated from my wife. Yes. No,—I simply propose to end a false situation,—I believe that it will be better for my wife to live with her real husband, Zadeka. I invited Maria and him here and asked him to take care of her future. Yes."

Felix hung up the receiver. The office was hard and empty. The maps on the walls showed the

world. The Venetian glass made nickel-colored light. Rain dripped beyond the windows. Maria began to weep, and dropped her head on the table.

"This is an office, Maria," said Felix. "Stop. Go."

. . . In great cities human beings may sometimes feel—just like the wolves behind the nets of the wolf-hunt. Felix rose from behind the table when Maria and Edgar left. He walked rapidly—with his sick legs—up and down his office in straight geometric lines. The shoulders of Felix were even heavier than usual. The wrinkles of his forehead crept down to his eyes. His face was like that of a man who had covered thirty miles on foot, who had not eaten for a day and a night, and who had come to a strange house in the twilight to deliver a short, terrible, matter-of-fact piece of news,—not to rest, not to drink tea, but to go further into the miles of the night with the terrible news. Felix lifted the telephone receiver and rang energetically—to the first man, the second, the fifth.

"Yes, I am going for a cure. It is nothing. To-day I sent my wife to her real husband. I wish them the best of luck, and want to simplify matters if possible. Edgar Zadeka, my friend. I consider all of this the natural development of things and the duty of a Communist. Zadeka is an honest Communist. I helped my friend. It was hard for him."

Felix spoke in a tone which gave the third and the fifth to understand that Felix was completely at peace and not just barely jesting. The face of Felix

was immobile, the cheeks taut enough to go through rainy distances. Beyond the Venetian glass of the windows poured the autumn rain. Along the leaden city squares flowed the human crowd. The wolf, surrounded by nets,—in the forest, at dawn, in a freezing rain,—hears the yelling and howling of the criers,—the freezing rain has wetted the nets,—the wolf has nowhere to go. The first life and the second life have become mixed up. The Ilyinka poured Edgar and Maria out into the lead of the Red Square. If one is to glance from the direction of St. Basil toward the Kremlin,—the Asiatic Moscow Kremlin is magically transformed into mediæval European Gothicism. Here was the path of the second life that filled the heart with sunlight. Edgar felt physical pain crawl along his spine under his skull from the sight of the leaden square, the Gothics of the Kremlin, the September chill. In the jumble of the first life and the second life thundered the crowd. His eyes sank in the spaces beyond space.

“What are we going to do, Edgar?” asked Maria.

“You go home at once,” answered Edgar.

“Which home?” asked Maria.

Edgar did not answer. The Gothics of the Kremlin were silent. Edgar remembered how he carried his sweetheart Maria on his hands yesterday, gathering all of her into his arms, how he spoke tender words to her. Now Maria was given to him forever. He looked from beyond the spaces at this woman, who stood near him,—looked at her with a stranger’s gaze. His eyes did not understand. Felix, in dis-

cussing how strong life was in man, how life held on, had told Edgar several times of that minute which had amazed him when Maria, in pools of blood, at the front, in the house where her father and mother had been killed, suddenly began playing the piano to herself, and smiled to Felix a bashful, helpless smile when she saw him. Maria was standing now near Edgar, her shoulders loosely hanging. The slanting rain beat in her face. The tears of the rain were on her face. Maria smiled to Edgar—a guilty, helpless smile.

“Go to a friend,” said Edgar. “I will come in an hour.”

Wolf-hunters in the woods drag the nets from place to place in order to press the wolves closer and closer. Telephones may be both wolf-hunts and public opinion at the same time. The Kremlin chambers, built hundreds of years ago for the Tsars, are high-ceilinged, but gloomy, full of silence and the warmth of Dutch tile stoves. Telephone bells can drop from the tables, pour like peas, flow like spring floods: the week-days, superiors, inferiors, colleagues, indifferent people, and enemies, may throw a foot on the desk by means of the telephone. The telephone rang in Edgar’s office.

The telephones spoke with the voices of his friends and colleagues.

“Felix just called us—”

“Felix is a real Communist, who reacts honestly—”

"The old morals, when men fought because of women and suffered from jealousy, are dying—"

"When is the wedding?—"

If you look from St. Basil, the Asiatic Moscow Kremlin is magically and suddenly transformed into mediæval European Gothic. In the Middle Ages the knights had a custom of challenging each other by throwing a glove. Such challenges may take on an Asiatic Russian turn and become wolf-hunts. Felix had been transformed into a crier.

It was necessary to decide and act.

VI

. . . Every historical epoch has its own morals, born of the epoch, and one with the epoch. The ribs of proof may break,—but without bending those ribs to the point where they break together with the proof, it may be said that the social morals of the epoch of the Revolution were political morals. One might be an illiterate man, who asked what kind of a science chemistry was and wrote the word cat with a k,—one might be an ignoramus and a great drunkard,—one might break his word of honour and be almost a traitor,—one might almost be a thief,—one might be dishonourable with women,—one might lose all conception of cleanliness and chivalry—but one had to be moral politically and orthodox communistically. To be politically illiterate was immoral. To be a Social Revolutionist, a Menshevik, an Anarchist, was not only immoral, but it was

shameful. The words Social Revolutionist and Menshevik were words of abuse. Human beings are born as various biological types, human beings are born politically giftless or gifted. Political talents are born just like writing, acting, or artistic talents. One may be a wonderful musician, giftless politically. One could be the most honest astronomer in the world, a man true to his word, to culture and to honesty in his relations with women,—a man with a world-famous name,—but such a man was not in the focus of the society of that time, such a man, the greater he was, the more perplexity he created, for he was lost when faced with the question—What is your political faith?—But these same astronomers were unjust, when they said,—“Mercy! he is a drunkard and a woman chaser, he has government furniture in his apartment, and the museum labels are not even removed!”—because those who had government furniture with labels and who sometimes did not know how to sign their names,—knew how to make the Revolution,—just as well as the astronomers knew their stars,—and knew how to die for the Revolution. These men had to live—with the most colossal expenditure of will and brains, reason, rationalism, subjecting everything to the will of reason, and destroying all that lay beyond reason.

.

The wolves have one law: they eat their old when the old grow weak, because the old are beyond the law of equality on account of their weakness,

and the wolves cannot bear inequality of strength. Man is a social being. Never, not at a single moment of his life, can man say that he really is what he is at that given moment. The reality of human character is disclosed by the laws of great numbers. There is a rule: if a man will stubbornly say many times to many people that he is a good and noble man, the man will decide that it is really so and will strive to be honest and noble. Men can be hypnotised into goodness—not by hypnotisers, but by human society. Human society is a more powerful mesmeriser than the hypnotic doctor. Wolves are subject to the equality of strength.

. . . In the biographies of Sergei Yessenin, a man who lived a phantasmagoric life, such a life as can arise only in epochs like the epoch of the Russian Revolution, it must be stressed that the man lived only with his emotions, and this set him apart categorically from the men who surrounded him. Sergei Yessenin perished tragically. And what must be stressed most essentially in his biography is his fateful meeting with Isadora Duncan. Sergei Yessenin became the lover of the world-famous dancer, the fifty-year-old Isadora Duncan, who was powerless to control her passions and who could not speak Russian. This woman, this dancer, who had maddened many minds, who had cost humanity many millions of dollars, who was known from Honolulu and New York to the Russian Irbit, who knew all the cosmetic factories of the world so that she

might preserve her body,—gave herself to the rye-haired youth from Ryazan,—and, according to the morals of the literary Bohemia of that time,—it was an honor for Sergei Yessenin to be the lover of such a woman, with whom he had to speak through the means of an interpreter. The morals of literary Bohemia took it for a happy gesture and glory. But Yessenin married Isadora Duncan, he became her husband—and this was the ruin of Yessenin. Nothing changed in their relations and in their drunken orgies. But it was ruin because everything became serious, because side by side with the youth in his early twenties there stood a woman of fifty, a woman who did not know the language of Yessenin, who had drunk the passion and the glory of very many men in all parts of the world, who was loved by the world, who was tired of the world, who had unlearned how to sleep at night and how to wear human clothes, who drank Russian vodka by the tumbler in order to stay awake. One cannot love such a wife. The lyricist of the rye fields, Sergei Yessenin, a fine man, beat Isadora Duncan's face with his fists and kicked her in the abdomen. He read her his poems in which he called her a bitch, and which she did not understand,—and with her he drank Russian bitter vodka by the tumbler, drinking his life out—his blood, his poems and his honour.

VII

The gloves of the challenges of mediæval knight-hood sometimes turn into wolf-hunts. The wolf at the wolf-hunt, his hair bristling, his teeth bared, must either tear through the nets in order to remain alive, or fall prey to a bullet in order to die: God prevent that he be taken alive,—for then he will be shut in a cage so that his fangs may wear out against the iron bars and that his skin may grow bald. Autumn days in Moscow and around Moscow, September days, if it rains, pass by like Russian beggars in slowness, in wetness, in rags,—and cast the earth into such murk in the night that one cannot see how the ragged beggars of the day find rest under the benches on the boulevards. In the daytime the streets are like lead, at night their blackness is lacquered by electric light. In the fields, in the woods, in the thickets—a wet silence, a man cannot see his own hand, and mud creeps to the knees. Such nights must exist that the earth may have time to repent. In the fields beyond Moscow, in an old park, in a mansion which had become a sanatorium, in a dark room at a window stood Felix Krantz with a cigarette in his hand. The sanatorium was asleep. The earth had sunk into the murk. The cigarette cast a red light on his cheek bones. The light of the cigarette on the cheek bones was very angry, the cheek bones were cruel, as cruel as the sanatorium night which had dressed him in a sanatorium robe after a day of Moscow tele-

phone calls, those telephone calls that had been not justice, but the great cruelty of the glove of mediæval knighthood. The cigarette would go out. Then matches would flare up. The man in the hospital robe stood leaning his head against the chill of the window glass, the wrinkles were gathered on his forehead as if he were an old man. There beyond the window was the black murk. The murk had hidden the earth. Beyond the mansion, beyond the old park, beyond the fields—was Moscow.

Maria was alone in the geometric formulæ of the home of Felix. No one came, no one called. This last night in the house of Felix was silent. Edgar should have come at five, but he had not yet arrived at midnight. Only the dog lay near her feet. The Moscow midnight whipped its rain in the wet light of the street lanterns. Near the Kremlin, on the shore of the Moscow River, is a little boulevard. The Kremlin and the shores can sink beyond space. At midnight near the Kremlin on the river shore walked a man in a broad-brimmed black hat, a black coat with a raised collar, and tan leggings. The man carried his head and shoulders high, exposing his face and breast to the wind and the rain. The eyes of the man were looking beyond space. It was Edgar Zadeka. It was necessary to return from beyond the spaces, to decide, to act. And the man decided. Energetically he shook the water and the disorder of thought from his head. Just as energetically he walked upwards along the walls of the Kremlin past St. Basil. In the house

of Edgar Zadeka, which belonged to the government, there were very thick walls which disappeared into the arches of the ceilings. The walls of the study were overgrown with books. Then from beyond the books came in Victoria, the wife, the mother, the friend, the woman who had arisen in his life together with youth in Budapest, who had passed with him through famine and the bayonets of the Revolution, making her way together with him through the Russia of misunderstandings, through the forests of the Russian language and Russian abandon. This woman had passed her woman's way with him from the eyes that had first closed with passion to the five-year-old caresses of Lissa. She came in with a candle in her hand, in a night robe, her shoulder was bare.

"You called me, Edgar?" said Victoria. "You were away very late. Felix called me up, although this is not the first of April. Tell me what happened. I didn't understand anything."

. . . there, beyond the spaces, in March, in the end of April, as soon as the snow melts away, in the ditches near the Budapest highway, grew blue flowers called snowdrops; Edgar and Victoria used to gather them in their youth. The same flowers grew in the field on the other side of the trench when Edgar lay under the Carpathians,—risking his life, Edgar had crawled out of the trench so that he could send such a flower to Victoria. He had seen the same kind of flower to-day, by accident, in the window of a florist's shop. His daughter Lissa

affirms that mama tells stories better than everybody else; this morning Edgar told Lissa the story of the bear that chopped the branch on which he was sitting; Edgar asserted that his story was better than mama's; Lissa found a way to defend her mother:—"All right,"—she had said,—“but mama's stories are with pictures, and I don't see anything in yours!”—In those terrible nights when the Soviet Revolution was being suppressed in Hungary, Victoria, dressed as a flower girl, had taken Edgar through the soldiers' cordons in a flower wagon; he was hidden by flowers, there were snowdrops there. . . .

The eyes returned from beyond the spaces. The face and breast of Edgar were exposed to the elements that he might act.

“Felix called you up?—He made no mistake about the first of April. He told you the truth.”

Victoria wrinkled her lips with pain, as she had once done on the front when she had dragged a piece of grenade out of the flesh of her wound with her fingers. The candle shook. The candle was put on the table. Victoria sat down at the table.—Lissa had found a way to defend her mother, she had said:—"All right, but mama's stories are with pictures, and I don't see how the bear chops down the branch!"—These snowdrops bloomed in the ditches of the Budapest highways when they were young, they will bloom while there is an earth, for thousands of years more, just as people will live for thousands of years, for Alissa was alive,—but he,

Edgar, and she, Victoria, will leave the earth in the crematorium of the Don Monastery, on their way to the crematorium they will become old, their hair will be entirely grey, their teeth will fall out, their skin and their thoughts will shrink, while the snow-drops will still bloom, bloom.

"Listen, Victoria. I must tell you that all is finished. All that is left is an elementary duty. Felix acted cruelly and honourably, according to the dictates of Communist morals. Judge as you will. I cannot but accept his challenge. I cannot leave a woman who is honourably given to me. Felix acted cruelly. Judge me as you will."

"All right," said Victoria. "To-morrow Alissa and I, we will leave you."

The years pass with leaden footsteps. The jaws and the shoulders of people may rot. Victoria, the wife, the mother, the friend, the woman who had arisen with his youth and who had given all she had to their mutual wayfarings,—in the September night you cannot see how the ragged beggars sleep under the benches on the boulevards,—Victoria was a proud woman, and given but little to words. Victoria rose from the chair, found strength to gather the folds of her robe to cover her wounded shoulder. Edgar knew that Victoria could not be a man's mistress. Maria was willing to be the second woman of Edgar, but there are no such wives, if they are wives. Victoria was able to gather her brows into stiff hardness.

"All right," repeated Victoria. "To-morrow

Alissa and I, we will leave you,—so as to save your honour, if your honour demands that you leave your daughter and your old wife.”

Victoria put her hands on the candlestick to take away the candle. The candle seemed to have come from the “Tales of Hoffman” as at that time,—Edgar did not remember when,—when at dawn or nightfall there lay beyond the low window feeble, wizened, yellow autumn light. And a good hour must have passed in silence while Victoria was gathering strength to move, for her whole hand was covered with stearine. Edgar stood at the table, commanding death. Victoria found strength, gathered strength, to lift her head and the candle.

“Good-bye, Edgar,” said Victoria.

“Good-bye, Victoria,” said Edgar.

“We have lived fifteen years together, Edgar.—Where does duty lie?”

“I cannot do otherwise, Victoria.—It is a duty.”

“All right. You will leave me and your daughter. But spare Alissa.—Have you no pity? Will you be able to take care of yourself?—A revolutionary duty?”

“Yes, I will take care of myself. Yes, it is a revolutionary duty.”

“Good-bye.”

Victoria found strength to walk firmly out of the room,—she was a proud woman. Victoria disappeared beyond the books. The walls ran into the arches. The house was overgrown with silence. Edgar stood near the table. His cheek bones had grown

one with his eyes, and the eyes were all for action. Edgar was a Bolshevik, a man of the breed that could act as the astronomers could watch stars, a man of the breed that could die for what they did.

Edgar picked up the telephone receiver.

Edgar said to a colleague:

"You asked when I will invite you to my wedding? —I am getting married at once, yes. If you will let me, I will come to you right now to drink a glass of strong hot tea. Excuse me that it is four in the morning. A very strange wedding. Bolshevik love."

Edgar said to Maria:

"Excuse me, my dear, for not coming at five. I was occupied. To-morrow you will come here to live."

Maria answered over the wires:

"I am very frightened all by myself. Where are you?—Come here at once, dear. Only Wolf is with me."

"I have work to do. To-morrow we will both go to the theatre," answered Edgar.

The second life had become the first. The candle smoked in the darkness. The walls receded into the arches. The house, as well as Edgar, belonged to the government.



VIII

He was a man of the great epoch of the Russian Revolution, which had given birth to him. At eight

threw human thought like *camera obscuræ* where and how they wished.

"I don't feel you at all, I don't see you at all, Maria."

"You don't want to see me."

The woman was here, the woman was giving her all—and he could take nothing from the woman. And then the greatest horror of all began: the woman who was in his arms, who was given to his arms,—was—unnecessary— . . . once, his wife Victoria, her head, her hair, her voice, her words, her warmth, her caresses, could force the man to take in his palm his own heart, when rest and that wonderful thing which had given life to the red-haired Lissa, were all regnant. The knee of a woman can be more majestic than Mont Blanc. The knees of Maria were bared. They were the knees of a weak city woman, almost a girl, and that was all.—And then Maria would say, giving all that was in her power to give:

"You do not love me, Edgar."

"No, I love you very much, my dear. I broke up my life for you."

"You do not love me, Edgar. I know everything, Edgar. You don't believe me. I am a stranger to you. I was necessary to you only as a mistress, but I am not fit to be your wife. And I don't believe you just as you don't believe me. I was your mistress, and that means that you may have other mistresses, and I other lovers,—we are both witness to that. I love you, but you don't believe that either.

I am your cross and your high deed,—not for me, nor for yourself, but for others.—You are silent, Edgar.”

Book fangs glittered golden on the shelves from the red wood of their gums. Edgar spoke then, fervidly, wizard-like; Edgar’s eyes shone exactly like the eyes of his steppe forbears when they swore fealty to the Christian God before the Catholics led them to the fire; Edgar grasped the shoulders of Maria, and pressed them so that tears of pain appeared in her eyes; and Edgar cried:

“I love you, I love you, Maria, I love you terribly!—Sit down at my side, lay your head on my knees. I will read books aloud to you. Listen!—We will study!”



Edgar Zadeka read a great number of books. He was a man of thirty-seven, a tall dark man, with a perfectly built body, without even a professional defect. The books should have spoiled his sight, but he did not wear eyeglasses. He was a man of tremendous memory and erudition, of organised will and education. The Revolution had to conquer. Edgar could tighten his will so that his eyes would begin to look into space with a gaze that did not see space. At eight in the morning the automobile stood at the entrance.

IX

Maria lived in the room that was once Victoria's. In the day time the house was empty. Nobody came there. Maria had brought her dog with her, morose, hairy, a mixture of a wolf and a shepherd. The name of the dog was Wolf. Wolf growled at everybody, he was gloomy and angry, and he knew only Maria. The friendship between Wolf and Maria had begun in the days of his puppyhood. During the first few days in Edgar's house, Maria was re-arranging her room, the room that had once been Victoria's, moving closets, re-hanging curtains. Once she slipped from a window sill, and her hand was scratched till it bled. Wolf had not been taught to lick. Wolf saw blood on Maria's hand, and he began to lick the scratch energetically,—healing the wound with his wolfish medicine. Then Maria embraced Wolf's head and began to weep bitterly, the whole day long. Wolf licked the wound till the blood stopped flowing. Maria—a little woman—had a little life,—childhood and school near the factory,—her mother's caresses and her mother's death, at the same factory in the house where Maria was born. Besides Maria and Wolf, there was a silent old woman in Edgar's house. The old woman brought wood for the stoves and cooked soup. Maria warmed herself near the Dutch stoves, and walked through the empty rooms, under the arches of the windows. Beyond the windows fell snow and flowed an incomprehensible life. No one came, the

days were as endless as deserts. The life into which Edgar would go, where her mother and father had been killed, where her only love, her love for Edgar, was being killed, terrified her. Every human being has the right to live. This little woman, pretty and with weak hands, did not know this right of hers. Beyond the windows were the toothed walls of the Kremlin, the white snows lay over everything like old age, the jackdaws above the Kremlin cried destruction.—So passed the days and came—most terrible of all,—the nights. Edgar came in, massive, crushing everything with himself, this man from a life which she did not know. The eyes of Edgar—for her—were beyond the spaces. She saw the most terrible thing that one who loves can see,—that she was unnecessary to Edgar, tragically unnecessary; for the man was making tremendous efforts to be tender, to be passionate—and instead of real blood reacted with fuchsine. Edgar did not see that every minute he was with Maria he withdrew himself from her into the life which was hidden from Maria. Maria was ready to give him everything—but he could not take anything from her. On those nights it was terrible for her to be near him, near this man whose blood had become fuchsine,—and she was afraid to go away from him, from his cavern of books into the murk of her room, which had once been Victoria's. Nevertheless she would go away from Edgar on those nights when he convulsively read reports and books. In the dark cave of her room she was met by Wolf; the

gloomy dog would lay his head on her knees, fall asleep and guard the night with one eye open.—Edgar would remain with his books in the grip of that vise-like will which does not see the spaces.

. . . The house was silent at night, with a silence which can become mouldy. The human mind can reach a strange state. Black murk was in the room. Edgar could not see the books physically—but he saw them. The books looked like great jaws from the shelves, shining with the gold of their fangs in gums of red wood. Each book is a replica of real human life, a convulsion of thought,—books are in reality a morgue, a death-room, in which real life lies buried, dead thoughts in imitation of living ones, human convulsions like those in the crematorium. Edgar did not know whether he was asleep or awake, but he sensed his brains and his thoughts physically. The subconscious covered the lobes of his brains in the same way that opaque shades cover the glass of the lamps in railroad sleeping cars. Only a little slit was left for the conscious. His will wanted to close the shades entirely. In the gloom of the subconscious it was very warm, restful, quiet. Every man brings forth sensations that are peculiar to that man only; in his subconscious there was a sense of Alissa. There were two lives: one in the murk of the shades, and one that pulsed in the running mice of thought. The mice ran—against the will,—and the conscious watched the progress of their running. With instantaneous agility thought ran into one

memory and the other, the two memories united into one and returned to the conscious at the moment when a vision came from the remotest places:—it was the shoulder of Victoria, as it had once lain near him and at the same time as it looked on the Civil War front when Victoria was removing a piece of grenade from the flesh of her shoulder with her fingers. In the murk of the subconscious it was very restful, warm, quiet. The conscious felt that there was not a single thought in the brains. The eyes were closed, he could not see physically: but he saw Maria enter, stand on the threshold for a minute and walk to the bookshelves. What began to take place was incomprehensible. The eyes of his wife were closed. His wife began to grow smaller, she sank more and more into herself. His wife, his second, Maria, turned into a book. The book of his wife rose in the air and stood on a shelf side by side with Spielhagen. The *camera obscura* of Spielhagen pushed Karl Marx to the floor. Incomprehensibilities were afoot. The room spread out into the Andreievsky Hall of the Fifteenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party. Maria stood, a book. Heavy-shouldered Felix approached the bookshelves, took the book, Maria, opened it, looked into it, and threw it carelessly on a table. Then from the subconscious there ran by hundreds at once—not sensations, but thoughts and visions,—and the entire subconscious, the entire brain, the entire body, began to undergo unbelievable heaviness, straitness, impotence, pain. The conscious moved the shades apart

—energetically—along the whole brain. Night, the empty room, silence, no one was there.

“The books must be taken away, in reality Maria is like a book!—I must live! I must write the tables of the law for the future!”—

Silence, nobody, nothing.

Incomprehensibility again. Wolf was howling, howling despairingly. Some one moved and groaned behind the wall. Edgar lit a candle. Edgar began to run through the rooms. In Victoria's room on the black wall high above the floor hung Maria in a white shirt. Wolf howled with human grief at Maria's feet. Edgar tore Maria from the rope. The three beat about on the floor in hysterics and convulsions—Maria, Edgar and Wolf. Wolf was licking Maria, her neck, her breast, her tears. Maria and Edgar spoke together. Wolf no longer growled at Edgar as was his wont.

“Kill me, Edgar,” said Maria. “Kill me, my dear. It seemed to me that I had a right to live, because I have never done harm to anybody,—but you have killed me already. Tell me, and I will do all you say.”

And for the first time during the last months Edgar found real, true, heartfelt words that were very simple and naïve. Edgar, together with Wolf, in Wolf's way, but not pushing him away, kissed Maria, her eyes, her throat, her shoulders, and whispered:

“My dear, my dear, my darling, my snowdrop—”

X

At eight in the morning a closed automobile stood at the entrance. A quiet man in leggings, a spring overcoat, a black broad-brimmed hat, with a portfolio under his arm, walked out of the door, shook the chauffeur's hand in greeting, and asked for the news. The chauffeur grunted with the cold. The machine moved towards the millstones of the Revolution.

XI

. . . In the Novo-Devichy and Don Monasteries ended the bookshelves of the years of human existence. In the crematorium man experiences human agonies for the last time. In the furnace of the crematorium, in a temperature of two thousand degrees Reaumur, the coffin and the clothes burn to nothing in two minutes; there remains the naked corpse, and this naked corpse begins to move. These last human agonies may seem to be metaphysical, and in violation of death. These last human movements are subject to a strange law. The corpse's legs bend under, his hands creep to his neck, and place themselves crosswise on his breast, the head is sucked in between the shoulders. The man—before he burns into nothingness—takes the same position which he had in the womb of his mother, when he was arising from the same nothingness.

THE LETTER

I. BABEL

THIS is a letter home, dictated to me by Kurdiukov, a boy in our expeditionary detachment. It deserves not to be lost. I have written it down without ornamentation, and I give it word for word as it was first dictated.

“Dear mother, Yevdokia Fyodorovna. In the first lines of this letter I hasten to inform you, that thanks to the Lord, I am alive and well, hoping to hear the same from you. And I bow to you to the very ground. . . .” (Here follows a list of relatives, godfathers, godmothers. . . . Let us leave that out, and pass on to the second paragraph.)

“Dear mother, Yevdokia Fyodorovna Kurdiukova. I hasten to write to you that I am at present in the Red Cavalry of Comrade Budenny, and that with us is your kinsman Nikon Vassilich, who is at present a Red hero. He has taken me with him into the detachment of the Political Department, and we deliver literature and newspapers to the front—the *Moscow News*, the *Moscow Truth*, and our own merciless paper the *Red Cavalryman*, which every fighter on the front wants to read, after which he attacks the rotten Poles with heroic spirit, and I live with Nikon Vassilich very wonderfully.

"Dear mother, Yevdokia Fyodorovna. Send me what you can, all in your power. I beg you to kill the little spotted hog and to send me a package to the Political Department of Comrade Budenny to Vassili Kurdiukov. Each night I lie down to rest without eating, and without any bed-clothes, so that it is terribly cold. Write me a letter about my Styopka, if he is alive or not, I beg you—take care of him and write me about him—if he is still hoof-bound, or is it over, and also about the itch in his forelegs, and if he has been shod or not. I beg you, dear mother, Yevdokia Fyodorovna, wash without fail his forelegs with the soap which I left behind the ikons, and if daddy used up the soap, buy some in Krasnodar, and God will reward you. Let me also write you that the country here is altogether poor; the muzhiks hide in the woods with their horses from our red eagles; very little barley is to be seen, and it is very small, and we laugh at it. They sow rye and also oats. Here hops grow on sticks, so that it looks very neat: they make moon-shine out of it.

"In the second lines of this letter I hasten to write you about daddy that he killed brother Fyodor Timofeich Kurdiukov a year ago. Our red brigade of Comrade Apasenko was advancing on the city of Rostov, when treason took place in our ranks. And at that time daddy was a company commander in Denikin's army. Those who saw him said that he used to wear medals on him, as under the old régime. And because of that treason all of us

were captured, and brother Fyodor Timofeich fell under daddy's eyes. And daddy began to cut up Fedya, saying: 'scoundrel, red dog, son of a ——,' and so on, and continued until dark, until Brother Fyodor Timofeich passed away. I wrote you a letter then, how your Fedya was lying there without a cross. But daddy caught me with the letter and said, 'You are your mother's children, her root, the slut's—my life is lost, I will destroy my own seed for the sake of the truth,' and other things like that. I accepted the tortures from him like the Saviour Jesus Christ. But in a little while I ran away from daddy and joined my detachment in the brigade of Comrade Apasenko. And our brigade received orders to move to the city of Voronezh for rest, and we rested there and also got horses, knapsacks, automatics, and all that we needed. About Voronezh let me write you, dear mother, Yevdokia Fyodorovna, that it is a very wonderful little city, maybe a little bigger than Krasnodar, the people in it are good looking and the river good for bathing. They gave us two pounds of bread a day, a half pound of meat, and enough sugar, so that on rising we drank sweet tea, and did the same thing before sleep, and forgot about hunger, and for dinner I went to brother Semyon Timofeich for pancakes or goose, and lay down to rest after that. At that time the whole regiment wanted Semyon Timofeich for its commander, because of his bravery, and such an order was received from Comrade Budenny, and he was given two horses, a uniform, a wagon

for his belongings and the order of the Red Flag, and I was his brother. Now if a neighbour should hurt you—Semyon Timofeich has the right to kill him. . . . Then we began to chase General Denikin, we killed thousands of them and chased them into the Black Sea, but we didn't see daddy anywheres, and Semyon Timofeich looked for him on all fronts because he was grieved for brother Fedya. But, dear mother, as you know daddy and his obstinate character, this is what he did—he dyed his red beard black and was in the city of Maikop in civilian clothes so that none of the inhabitants knew that he was a Life-Guard in the old army. But truth will always out. Your kinsman Nikon Vassilich saw him by chance in the house of an inhabitant and wrote Semyon Timofeich a letter. We mounted our horses and covered two hundred miles—I, brother Senka, and others who volunteered.

“And what did we see in the city of Maikop? We saw that the rear did not sympathise with the front at all, and that it was full of treason and Jews, as under the old régime. And Semyon Timofeich argued a lot with the Jews in the city of Maikop, because they did not want to let daddy go, but put him under lock and key in the jail and said—‘we received orders from Comrade Trotsky not to kill prisoners, we will judge him ourselves, don't be angry, he will get his.’ But Semyon Timofeich held to his own and proved that he was the commander of the regiment, and had all the orders of the Red Flag from Comrade Budenny, and threatened to

kill all who were arguing for holding daddy and did not give him up, and the boys from the regiment threatened too. But just as soon as Semyon Timofeich got hold of daddy he began to whip daddy and had all the soldiers stand at attention in the yard according to military order. And then Senka threw water on daddy Timofey Rodionich's beard, and the dye came off the beard. And Senka asked Timofey Rodionich:

“ ‘Do you feel well, daddy, in my hands?’

“ ‘No,’ said daddy, ‘I feel bad.’

“Then Senka asked:

“ ‘And did Fedya, when you cut him up, feel well in your hands?’

“ ‘No,’ said daddy. ‘Fedya felt bad.’

“Then Senka asked:

“ ‘And did you think, daddy, that you would feel bad too?’

“ ‘No,’ said daddy, ‘I did not think I'd feel bad.’

“Then Senka turned to the crowd and said:

“ ‘And I think that if ever I fall into your hands there will be no mercy for me. And now, daddy, we'll put an end to you.’

“And Timofey Rodionich began to swear at Senka and his mother and the mother of the Lord and to beat Senka's mug. And Semyon Timofeich sent me away from the yard, so that I can't, my dear mother, Yevdokia Fyodorovna, describe to you how they ended daddy, because I was sent away.

“After that we were quartered in the city of No-

vorossiysk. About this city I can tell you, that beyond it there is no more dry land, but only water, the Black Sea, and we stayed there till May, when we advanced on the Polish front and are now attacking the Poles for all we are worth.

"I remain your dear son, Vassili Timofeich Kurdiukov. Mammy, look after Styopka, and God will not fail you."

This is the letter of Kurdiukov, unchanged to the last word. When I ended—he took the written page and hid it in his bosom, next to his skin.

"Kurdiukov," I asked the boy, "your father was a bad man?"

"My father was a stallion," he said gloomily.

"Was your mother better?"

"She fitted him. If you want to see them, here they are."

He held out a broken photograph to me. On it was pictured Timofey Kurdiukov, a broad-shouldered Life-Guard in a military cap, with a combed beard, immovable, with high cheek bones, with a gleaming light in his colourless and meaningless eyes. At his side, in a bamboo armchair, there glimmered a tiny peasant woman in a belted waist, with care-worn, clear and modest features. And near the wall, against the pitiful provincial photographic background with its flowers and pigeons, loomed the figures of two youths—monstrously huge, dull, broadfaced, eyes popping out, motionless as at a drill,—the two brothers Kurdiukov—Fyodor and Semyon.

GOLD TEETH

MIKHAIL ZOSHCHENKO

It's a long time, my friends, that I've been getting ready to tell you about the Komsomolets Grisha Stepanchikov, but I always forget somehow. And time passes, of course.

Maybe a half year has gone since this piece of unpleasantness visited Grisha.

Of course the boy was caught in circumstances that looked bad—a bourgeois leaning and the general undermining of socialism. But allow me to shed complete light on this redoubtable chronicle.

It took place, I think, in Moscow. Or perhaps it was not Moscow. But it seems to me it was Moscow. I think so because of the sweep of the thing. But I will not insist on Moscow. The *Red Gazette* did not go into details. It only mentioned in small type—that it took place in the Semyonovsky nucleus.

And this is what happened. In this Semyonovsky, that is, in the nucleus, this same much-suffering Grisha Stepanchikov was a member. And somehow this Grisha had three teeth knocked out. Why they were knocked out—that is a matter unknown to us. Perhaps on account of too much physical culture. Perhaps he ran into a tree. Or perhaps he ate too

many sweets in his childhood. The only thing we do know is that it was not in a drunken brawl that it happened. That is quite impossible!

And so, there's our Grisha, minus three teeth. The others are all in their place. But those three, well, they simply aren't.

And he a young fellow too! Many-sided! It isn't interesting for him, you understand, to pass his time without the three teeth. What is his life in their absence? He can't whistle. It's hard to eat. And there's nothing to hold a cigarette with. And then, there's a hiss when he speaks! And tea runs out of his mouth.

The boy did everything he could—he used wax in the hole, and bread to cover it—but it didn't help any.

Grisha saved a little money. And went to a dentist.

"Put in," he says, "if that's what is needed, three artificial teeth."

The dentist was young, careless. He didn't enter into the psychology of the Semyonovsky nucleus. He just went ahead and put three gold teeth into Grisha's mouth.

Well, really, there are no words to describe how rich they looked. Let him open his mouth—a picture! You couldn't take your eyes away. A nocturne!

But in the nucleus they began to look askance at Grisha. That is, as soon as he'd open his mouth to eat or to talk, all of them would look. What was

the matter with him? What did he mean by getting those teeth?

There was a lot of talk about the event. Where, they would say, did he get those Nep ways? Why such a bourgeois strain? Can't an ordinary Komsomolets chew and eat with a hole in his mouth?

And at the regular meeting they raised the question—Can such a thing be allowed? And they decided in principle: "To acknowledge the possession of gold teeth a phenomenon leading to the denial of socialism and its ideas, and we members of the Semyonovsky nucleus declare war on their owners, as a phenomenon tending to destroy the ideas of the Komsomol. As for the teeth—to give them to the fund for the unemployed. Otherwise the question of expulsion from the ranks of the Komsomol is to be raised." (*The Red Gazette.*)

And here the chairman added a few things himself. He was of course a hot-headed man, and uncontrollable. And he uttered many bitter words.

"It's not for nothing," he says, "that I am your chairman, and yet," he says, "I have nothing to do with gold knick-knacks. And," he says, "it's a long time that I have only roots instead of my back teeth. And yet I chew. And how I chew—only God himself can tell. Maybe I use my fingers to help me chew. But I don't put on front."

Grisha Stepanchikov, of course, cried a little. It was sad for him to give such teeth to the fund for the unemployed. He began to explain: "Don't you

see that they are soldered? That it's hard to knock them out again?"

And he didn't give them up.

As to whether he was expelled from the Komsomol or not, we do not know. There is no further information about this case on hand. But we can believe that he was expelled.

THE SONG OF THE CHAINS

N. LIASHKO

ALEXEI ANIKANOV was put into old fetters, fetters that had been worn smooth and shiny on some one's legs. The fetters had been forged long ago, in the Kuban. Alexei found this out in prison, in Siberia. He was stopped in the prison yard by an old prisoner, who bent down, felt the fetters with his fingers, and cried joyously:

"Eh-ha! I used to wear them. I knew them by the sound. I heard something familiar. I wore them in the Kuban about fifteen years ago. They were new then, rough. Before my time a Georgian wore them. He escaped from his cell, and left them behind. Then I was sentenced, and became their owner. And when I was taken away by convoy, I sweated in a bath-house in some place or other on the way, soaped my legs, tore at them till the blood came, took off the fetters, and crept under the sweating bench. Not only I—three of us ran away that time. Those were the days!"

His reminiscences made the old man drunk. His eyes gleamed through the twilight like moons. He winked at Alexei, slapped his shoulder, and added:

"You are a young fellow yet, but your fetters are lucky. You understand, lucky!" . . .

The rumour that after fifteen years, the old man had recognised his fetters by their sound, found its way into all the prison cells. Not everybody believed him, but the old man dispelled all doubts: his mark could be seen on the bridge of the leg-irons.

This set the old man apart from the rest of the prisoners, and focused the attention of all on the chains. Who had devised them? Who had forged them?

The prison had showered manifold curses on the prisoners who made chains, handcuffs and death-shrouds in the prison shops. A number of the prisoners became angrier and more melancholy. And some trembled, for they had looked into the eyes of truth: we build our own prisons, we forge our own chains, we sew our own shrouds, we shoot and hang ourselves. And all ourselves, ourselves. . . .

II

Alexei began his letter home with a joke about his wearing lucky fetters. After a few lines, he forgot himself; the letter, when finished, was hot and harsh, and he was forced to send it in secret, evading the prison authorities.

Alexei's father, Matvei, a gloomy, silent driller, read the letter three times, and after the agitation it raised in his breast had quieted down, muttered:

"Well, well . . . so . . ."

The answer to Alexei was written by Matvei's

oldest son, the boilerman Vassili. Ordinarily, Matvei was not interested in letters—it was always the same: regards and regards,—but this time he said:

“Leave a place on the page. Write everything as usual, but there will be something special from me.”

Vassili wrote about their health, about the factory, about their friends, and then turned:

“Well, what am I to write?”

Matvei rose, leaned on the table with his broad hands, and said, quietly, hoarsely:

“Write this: Your father asks you not to throw away those fetters. . . . He wants you very much, Alyoshka, to get them in some way if you can. . . . And to send them to him as a remembrance,—to me, that is. . . .”

On the moustached face of Vassili, dazed from deafness, gathered wrinkles. Matvei’s wife, his daughter-in-law, his daughter, and his seven-year-old granddaughter, raised their eyes.

“It’s bitter enough as it is, and you add to it,” his wife protested sadly.

“Fire with fire, mother, fire with fire,” muttered Matvei, and pointing to the letter, added severely: “Write. What are you looking at?”

And Vassili wrote.

III

The chain-gang term was hard, but Alexei did not lose heart. Even at his trial, when he heard his sentence, he had said to himself: “Keep up, don’t

worry, Alyoshka." And he was true to his word. No matter what torments he underwent, he remembered that he was only twenty-two, that there was a lot of life before him yet. He remembered another thing, too, a thing that is rare and precious in men: longing and tears do not make your life brighter, your torments easier to bear, the men around you happier. Just the opposite, you will poison the others, and ruin and break yourself.

He behaved in prison as if his life had not begun yet, as if slavery and chains were only a preparation for life. Some men in his ward felt that his soul was filled with a rainbow, that he was substituting that which should be for that which was, that he was covering life, its hardships and dirt, with the light of dreams, and that he was going along his chosen way as if there were no walls, no bars,—no chains on his legs.

In his thoughts he was free, among men he watched himself and made strong efforts to understand whether he would fall under his self-assumed burden, whether he would break and betray and crucify that which he believed. And he gathered strength, he made ready.

With the men about him he was frank and open, but he could not bear the mockery of the warden and the guards. Often he flared up and was put in the dark room. He was beaten, but the undying life in him deafened his pains and torments, and the day when he was free to live in exile, found him healthy. His face was covered with grey pallor,

the veins showed on his temples, but the blueness of his eyes shone like flowers in a waste, and there was something fresh and promising in their changes of hue.

In the office, during the last search, the warden asked:

"You bore up, Anikanov?"

"I bore up."

"Look out, the next time you won't bear up."

"I'll bear up the next time, too."

The warden pierced Alexei with his eyes, nodded at the tied-up fetters which the latter had begged for himself, and asked mockingly:

"You'll bear up? You'll come to prison with your own fetters? They won't save you. . . ."

"I am taking the fetters as a model to copy," Alexei answered hollowly. "I am going into the chain-making business outside. Who knows who may need chains soon?"

The warden understood the hint, narrowed his eyes, but controlled himself in time, and said slowly:

"Well, that's a business, too. . . ."

IV

The notice was brought to the Anikanovs on Saturday. On Sunday Vassili went to the post office and brought home a box covered with canvas.

"From Alyoshka."

They gathered around the table. Vassili ripped up the canvas, removed the top of the box with a

chopping knife, and took out the rope-tied fetters from the tightly packed, odorous wood shavings. His fingers slipped from the knots. The chains moved under the slackened rope like a snake, slipped out of it and rang dully. The leather leg-guards, tightly wound into a roll and polished by the leg-irons, fell out of them. They were tied with a soft strap, which connected the bridge with the belt and held up the weight of the fetters.

"How is that . . . for the legs?"

They touched the fetters, lifted them, looked at them with widened eyes. The mother sobbed. Vassili shuddered. In order to drive away awkwardness and anxiety, he picked up the fetters with a rush, and said loudly:

"Some chains. . . . I have to try them on. . . ."

He bared his legs, put on the leg-guards and fastened them with wire. The chill of the iron leg-pieces passed up his calves and pressed at his heart. Vassili caught up the bridge with his disobedient hands entangled in the chains, started to walk awkwardly, and said in a strange voice:

"This is how Alyoshka showed off in them. . . . Crazy, so help me God!"

He straightened up and felt sharply that if he had been put into chains he would have howled with fear. And hiding this feeling, dropped:

"And he wrote in his letters that it was nothing, that it was all right. . . ."

The door creaked. Matvei stepped over the threshold, looked at Vassili, and said angrily:

"You found some plaything! Earn it yourself, then play with it. . . ."

Vassili cast down his eyes, took off the fetters, put them on the table, and muttered:

"Who wants to? . . ."

"You don't want to? All you know is to work, to go home, to gorge and to snore. . . ."

"And do you want to drive him to Siberia too?" the daughter-in-law was hurt. "It is enough that one suffers for all of us."

Matvei looked at her sideways, and shot out:

"You know yourself what I want," and approached the table.

He touched the links, moved them, opened and closed the leg-pieces. He smoothed the leg-guards out, ran his fingers over the creases made by the irons, and his heart sank within him. The words of Vassili, who had recovered, excited him. Big, strong, heavy-set, always sleepy, he seemed wooden to Matvei. He was no match for Alyoshka. The latter had studied, had reached everything by himself. You couldn't send him for a package on a holiday—he would leave in the morning and return only at night. He would read aloud to everybody. Eh . . .

Alyoshka's trial, his prison sentence, had silvered the head of Matvei, extended the baldness to his ears, and started a fire burning in his heart. He pitied him, pitied him to the point of tears, but the flame made his jaws come together and burned up the words of pity,—let it be so. Matvei saved the

newspaper in which his son's speech in court was printed, and read it when there was no one in the house.

Touching the fetters, he imagined how they had squeezed the young legs. He pictured Alyoshka small, emaciated, tormented with pain. But one had to endure somehow. He wanted to press him to his heart, to carry him in his arms, to run his fingers over his ribs so that Alyoshka might shout with laughter and grasp him by the beard.

All day Matvei was silent and gloomy. Only in the evening he smiled to his wife and said:

"Just so, mother. . . ."

"What is it?"

"Nothing . . . only about Alyoshka. . . ."

"A-a," his wife answered and sobbed.

"Well, well, but you are a cry baby. . . ."

Next day at dinner time Matvei brought home a piece of tow soaked in machine oil, wiped the fetters with it, put them in the box, and set the box next to Alyoshka's books on the book shelf.

V

At the factory they found out about the fetters from Vassili. Men who worked at adjacent lathes, acquaintances, asked Matvei to bring them to the shop. The older men asked quietly, the young ones with warmth. Matvei refused all the time.

"Why look at them? What's the use?" But at

the end of the summer he gave in. "I will bring them to the Thanksgiving Service, wait. . . ."

The chief shop was the assembling room. Here locomotives were being put together. Tremendous, tri-spanned, with rail tracks, with an electric crane that looked like a flying vulture. Three strips of glass roof that looked like mica with sun and rain, covered the rows of lathes, from bolt cutters to crank shafts—rows of lathes spread like wings, spreading tables, moving tongs with locomotive parts, and the tool room locked in a netted partition.

During working hours locksmiths, die cutters, planers, drillers, spreaders, moved and ran about the room like blue ants. Day labourers marched in crowds.

With a roll of thunder the vulture soared to and fro, flashed sparks, moved its ringed steel paw, carried trusses, pig iron and frames in the shining hook that was like a clamped claw. The flood tide of sound trembled, widened.

Copper flew from under the cutters like a swarm of golden crackling insects. Iron snaked with silver. Pig iron fell in ashy flakes. The beds of the planing lathes groaned under the steel teeth. The fangs of the chiselling lathes sank rhythmically. The catches of the automatics chirruped like cicadas. The hammers fell on the caulking irons, on the rivets, on the mountings, on the bolts. Like the dull beating of drums the talk of the trundle-heads spread over the floor.

And higher in the embrace of the crane sang the

crank shafts. The belts murmured, whispered, smartly whipped over the block-sheaves with their wired ends. Drops of iris fell from the watering cups on the cutters, and streams of steam infused with iron spurted towards the transmitters. Stone grinders licked the steel stentoriously, and emery wheels shrieked and gave birth to sheaves of stars.

Above the main entrance of the shop, inside, hung an ikon: a blue sky with grey clouds, and on them the Holy Virgin in an ornamental veil. The Day of the Intercession was the most solemn of the factory holidays. Year in, year out, on the eve of that day Matvei would go to the cemetery to cut the aftergrowth, and to the woods to cut branches. He washed the ikon, cleaned the image lamp, and helped to decorate the assembling room with greenery.

VI

The first of October was like the juice of a melon—clear, sound, odorous. From beyond the factory came the smell of autumn grass, of the steppe. But brightest of all were the imperceptible wind and the cobwebs. There were many of these cobwebs, swimming at different heights in the arms of the wind like ropework torn from a ship, and sparkling.

The assembling room was bright with branches gilded and made bloody by the autumn. From the assembled locomotive along the edge of the scaffolding ran a piny, curly snake of braided autumn flowers, redolent of the forest. Opposite the table,

covered with cloth of gold, its ends met and surrounded the ikon with a ring.

From the side bays the cleaned lathes, smelling of turpentine, and smeared with grease, yawned and looked on with the eyes of patrons. The tables and the furthest lathes brightened with blouses, dresses, kerchiefs and hats. The priests and the deacons prayed in different voices that the Holy Virgin, sitting in the clouds on the wall, might cover all from pain and sin with her veil.

At the Thanksgiving Service there were many connoisseurs of music; and the choir—the workers sang in it, too—was trying hard. Its thunder beat at the wings of the dumb vulture, at the glass roof, and rumbled beyond the crowd. The lines of lathes, the corners, the binders of the rafters, echoed like an organ.

At the thundering waves of "Many Years," it seemed that even the lathes stood up on tip-toe so that they might see the reddened deacon and the choir ready to exhaust itself in sound. The unriveted locomotive and its makers were sprayed with cold water from the holy sprinkler.

Shop superintendents, engineers, foremen, hurried to the director. He gleamed in his tie pin, he shone in his linen, and in the parting of his hair, he nodded, accepting felicitations, and bared his teeth, blackened by tobacco. Assistant foremen, draughtsmen, technicians, mounters and gang bosses did not dare to approach him, but stretched themselves into his field of vision, bowed several times,

caught at his words, passed them to each other, and tried not to notice the mockery in the looks of the workmen.

The crowd tripped over iron, over the pigs and the bars, moving toward the cross, the gospel and the ikon. The guests, women and children, spread over the shop and looked at the machines. The choir was silent. . . .

The solemnity in the assembling room seemed to have come to an end. And suddenly the droning rumble of voices was cut in half by a clang. Nothing had ever rung in that way in the assembling room. Many people turned. A crowd gathered at the furthest planing table, around Matvei and the fetters. Everybody tried to reach the fetters, they touched them, they looked at them, they clashed their links, they considered from what they were made, and wondered how they had become so smooth from wear. The crowd swarmed. Somebody cried from behind:

"Hey! Get up on the lathe and show them to everybody!"

The die cutter who held the fetters found himself on a lathe. He swung the fetters as if they were a censer, and said distinctly:

"Here. These are the fetters of Alexei Anikanov, a die cutter of our guild. He wore them in prison for our cause. Now he is in exile. Maybe he will soon return. . . . Return, you understand?"

He shook the fetters again, and jumped down into the crowd. The superintendent of the office ran

from the director who was waving his arms, and rushed to the lathes.

"Make way. Who was speaking? What was he showing? Fetters? What fetters? What the devil was it? Which Anikanov's?"

The die cutter tore the fetters from Matvei's hands and passed them to a neighbour.

"Farther, to our boys. . . ."

They gleamed from hand to hand, and ringing in the middle of the crowd, slipped under a blouse next to a warm young body, and were silent.

"Who is Anikanov? You?"

"I."

"What did you show here?"

"My son's fetters."

"Which son's?"

"The one who is in prison."

"A-a, where are the fetters?"

Matvei looked straight at the superintendent, chewed his tongue, and said:

"They swam away."

"Where did they swim away?"

"Where they had to."

"Where they had to? Look to it, old man, that they did."

"I've begun to get blind from looking."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? Do you want to make a speech? Have you forgotten? Go home, all of you!"

Unwillingly, the crowd moved to the exit.

VII

The die cutter who had shown the fetters from the lathe was taken to jail at midnight. Spurs rang in the house of the Anikanovs from midnight till dawn. Shaven men, moustached men, dug into their things, looked into the oven, crawled into the attic, went to the barn, looked at the ground in the garden with the aid of a lantern, and lifted the floor boards in the kitchen. This disgusted Matvei, and he said:

"The fetters are not in the house."

They stopped searching, they were happy.

"And where are they? Who has them?"

"I won't tell you."

"You must tell us."

"I won't tell you."

They grew morose, they growled, they threatened, but they went away empty-handed. With the morning, factory spies began to watch Matvei. The foreman told him:

"I didn't expect that from you, Anikanov. What was the idea, really? . . . It doesn't fit you, you are an old man. . . ."

Matvei thought that he had made a mistake in his work, and muttered:

"I—well, I did my work right . . . just like the blue print . . ."

"There are no fetters shown in the blue print, he-he-he. . . . Why did you bring them yesterday?"

Eh, blockhead? People came together to pray, and you showed them fetters."

It grew dark in Matvei's eyes, the foreman seemed grey, the shop crimson.

"I didn't invent them and I didn't make them," he said controlledly. "Others invented them . . . and they chain people. . . . I only brought them, I had nothing to hide. . . ."

"Then why did you hide them after all? They didn't find them in your house. . . ."

Matvei looked at the foreman guardedly. "He knows everything already, and he is beginning"—and said aloud:

"I will lock them up behind thirty locks, and dig them into the ground."

"Some rubies!"

"Dearer than rubies. Wait till they chain up your son, you'll find out what they are then. . . ."

"Say, what are you talking about?"

"You began this yourself. And there's nothing for you to be proud about, we walk on the same earth. . . ."

The foreman shook his head, and walked off.

In all the shops of the factory they talked of the fetters that day, of what had happened with them yesterday, of the arrest and the search. Matvei was tired of telling how the thing had happened and drew away from the curious:

"They'll search you, and you'll find out yourself."

After lunch, he was overtaken in an alley by a

young fellow from the assembling room, told who had the fetters and given money that had been collected for Alexei. Matvei was overcome with joy. He muttered that he was not a pauper and that he would support his son himself, but he yielded. His eyes shone, he spoke of his joy, and said happily in farewell:

"You better take good care of the fetters, or you'll get into trouble. Don't think that because I am old I won't show you what I can do. . . ."

"You won't have to. We'll take good care of them. . . ."

For a minute Matvei looked from the gates at the disappearing young man and thought: "They remembered . . . well . . . so-o-o . . . they should have done it long ago. . . ."

VIII

The second time the fetters rang in the factory dining room was on New Year's Eve. There were a lot of people. The workmen's orchestra was playing. At the height of the merry-making, from the middle of the crowd that blocked the door of the corridor, slipped a couple disguised as prisoners, he in Alexei's fetters, she in a canvas skirt. They took each other's hands, quickly cut into the forty dancing pairs on the floor and deafened them with clanging. The couples broke up and remained motionless. Everybody rushed into the hall from the corridor and the buffet. The orchestra became confused, and stopped.

Thousands of eyes hungrily followed the couple with the orange aces and the letters A.K.T. on their backs. The couple danced a ring around the whole hall and rushed to the door.

The crowd swallowed them. The lights went out instantaneously and into the darkness rushed a rapidly increasing sound of paper. Something flew up in the air, fell, and covered the floor with a murmuring sound. The noise was cut by cries of fright. But the lights flashed up and softened the cries. Eyes moved in a lost way along the sides of the room and stopped on sheets of paper folded into triangles and lying on the floor like a flock of pigeons.

Astounded, the people looked at the papers, and did not understand. But a ringing voice called them by name:

"Proclamations!" — and numberless hands reached for the floor from all sides.

"Give them here! Wait! One to each, one to each, so that there might be enough for everybody."

Stamping, cries, the crackling of bent backs. And again the floor was grey, shone with the marks of heels, and grew pink and blue with the torn and crushed ribbons of serpentine.

The cry of the floor manager rose above the noise. The orchestra thundered. And it seemed to many that there had never been any prisoners nor the sudden darkness, the fright and the pigeons on the floor. It was a dream, an hallucination. . . .

In the office, a man stood near the telephone and cried into the transmitter:

"You must surround the dining room and search everybody. They have become too impudent."

In the corridor near the exit factory spies snooped, started conversations, acted as if they were happy, enthusiastic. Their glances pierced faces, they looked into the hall, but they only saw circling couples.

Young eyes slipped over their nonplussed faces and seemed to say in laughter: "We know, we know everything. . . . It was we, we."

The timid were gloomy and growled:

"They won't let us enjoy ourselves. . . ."

"We won't let you, we won't let you. . . ."

And in the young laughter, in the sounds of the orchestra, was heard a song, beating against the moving feet, breaking out fitfully, the feverish song of the fetters:

"Clang-clang-clang. . . ."

IX

The letter about what had happened in the factory on the Day of Intercession excited Alexei. He thought much about his father: the latter had warned him, growled at him, scolded him and his books, seemed to be dissatisfied, did not waste words on him, and here he was suddenly awakened. . . .

But after the letter about the New Year's party, about the dance in his fetters, about the searches and

arrests, he stopped thinking of his father—he began thinking of the song of his fetters in their freedom. He was an exile, half free, and they, back home, free as the air, sang of torments, of pain, of liberty. . . . They called, they aroused, they put on guard. . . .

In their song there was something sharp, something that upbraided.

“Arise, you have wasted enough time. . . .”

. . . In the spring when the factory was getting ready for the first of May the Anikanovs heard that Alexei had escaped from exile. Anxiety entered the house and held it in its grip. Everybody became more uncommunicative, they spoke more quietly, in the evenings they were all on guard. The noise that reached them from the street at night made them hold their breath and forced them to wait for a long time anxiously for a knocking at the window.

“Maybe they caught him somewheres . . . they will beat him.” The thought was tormenting. Matvei found a refuge for his son in a suburb and approached the lathes of the younger workmen oftener and with impatience.

“Well, have you heard anything?”

In the middle of May, during working hours he was handed a note, and some one whispered:

“From your son.”

He pulled the switch of his lathe, looked at the note, and rushed away from his machine. He imagined that the note was from prison: “They caught me, the devils caught me.” For a long time Matvei

wandered over the yard and through the shops. Tired, he rushed behind the painters' shed, sat down in the steppe grass, opened the note, and began to laugh. Alyoshka was free; far away, he was working in a factory.

"Good boy," Matvei praised him, and his eyes shone.

X

The fetters were hidden away, with other illegal matter, but everybody remembered them; the dark and oppressed, with fear; enemies, with wrath; friends, with love. Also in the office of the factory, in the secret service room, in the gendarmes' department, they could not forget them. Not a single search passed without reminders of them: where were they? Who had danced in them on New Year's Eve?

A rumour flew through the factory that several prisoners had made an inkstand for their beloved author out of their chains. There appeared an issue of a newspaper with the letter from the author to the prisoners, and the paper passed from guild to guild, from hand to hand, until it became an oily cobweb.

This excited the young and made them lose their heads. They began speaking of Alexei's fetters and decided to make a present out of them for the most famous of the French Socialists. They dreamed to nail the attention of the workmen of all countries to this present. They began drawing sketches, but

Matvei found out about their intentions, called them young snips and shamed them:

"Did you ask me? Or you don't reckon with old men any longer? Well, and did you ask Alyoshka? He is young, and it seems to me that he owns the fetters. Ah, you! . . . Earn your own and do with them what you will, but to use those of others, that's no business at all. You've got wind in your heads, you are young and green. . . ."

The young men had not expected such a lecture, but they saw that Matvei was right—they had to learn to turn their own fetters, and not those of others—their own tortures into playthings. Those of others were an emblem and an example.

And the fetters remained in an attic in the straw of the roof. The war that broke out, the mobilisation, robbed them of their place for a long time. They passed from house to house, from corner to corner, until a traitor appeared in the factory—their own man, well-read, with a prison term behind him, a planer.

He betrayed cautiously, rarely. But as soon as they had changed their places of assignation and meetings, and stopped to speak to him or greet him, he became angry. Men were taken to prison more and more often. Almost every one of whom the traitor knew anything was searched. Matvei was searched too. He was asked about the fetters and about his son. They threatened to find the fetters and to put them on his son again.

"You lie, that will never happen," Matvei de-

cided, and on the very next day walked to the suburbs for the fetters. He put them in a pouch, and carried them to Alyoshka's godfather, the painter Panov.

"Hide the present of your godson, otherwise it will be lost. See how far things have gone with us: we are afraid to trust each other. Will you hide them?"

Panov was fixing a pail, and he did not answer at once. This hurt Matvei.

"Don't be afraid," he said with irritation, "they won't come to search you. And if they do come, you can put the blame on me. Tell them Anikanov gave it to you to keep for him, and that you have nothing to do with it. You couldn't refuse him, say. And I won't deny it. . . ."

Panov moved away the pail, his aging eyes glanced at Matvei, and he stopped him angrily:

"Well, you better stop that. I never thought to hear that from you. Although we are relatives, still you could have done it without insulting me. . . . I am not afraid although you think that I am. . . . And I understand you. And if I am silent that is no reason for insulting me. . . . Yes, that is no reason. . . . It isn't the first day that you know me. . . . And Alyoshka is not a stranger to me—a son. . . ."

It was the first time that Matvei had seen Panov like that. He felt embarrassed, and then, like the old man he was, asked to be forgiven. . . . They sat long over the table, speaking soul to soul, and

Matvei walked out on the street refreshed and lightened.

XI

Panov guarded the fetters until the Revolution.

At the Anikanovs' the first news of freedom was met by the happy tears of the mother.

"I can't believe that my tortures are over. And I thought I would never live to see it. . . ."

Matvei went with the crowd from the factory to the city. A hurriedly sewn banner glowed like a poppy above him. New, bright, tremendous. At its side, the old flag that had lain underground seemed very tiny. . . . It had bided its time, and now it was straightening out the wrinkles pressed into it by years of darkness. The spring wind was washing it.

Matvei helped to disarm the old masters. He was in the secret service department, in the prison. He kissed the political prisoners. At night, he and his clumsy bull dog guarded a cross road, exchanging cries with the next sentry. He forgot that he was already more than fifty years old, he burned, he bustled about, but still he did not believe that freedom had arrived, he was afraid that it would be shot down again. He looked sharply at every soldier and pressed his jaws together.

The oath-taking of the military detachments in the forest of banners thawed the ice in him. From the square he went to Panov, congratulated him, and took the fetters. He carried them openly on

the streets and showed them to the passers-by. At home he hung them over the portrait of a bearded grey scholar, and said:

"Enough hiding, liberty has come to you, too."

He glanced at his folks who waited for him at the table, and added joyously:

"It seems that God will let even our lamb catch a wolf."

From that day on even strangers began to come to the Anikanovs. The mature walked in singly, youth in flocks. After the greeting they would ask:

"May we?"

"You may, you may . . ."

They approached the portrait, looked thoughtfully at the fetters, as if they were drinking in the essence of the links and imprinting them into their memories.

During working hours when only the mother and the granddaughter remained at home, children would come running, knock, and their voices would ring a long time in the corridor:

"Let us in, auntie,—just one look . . ."

They rolled in masses over the threshold, their eyes nailed to the portrait and the fetters, and they would whisper. Growing bolder, they put out their hands carefully, and then touched the links with more and more assurance. . . . The mother would scold them:

"Scat . . . the madcaps have found a new play-thing," and she would open the door. "Enough. Go home."

Their neighbours jested at her and Matvei.

"It looks as if you had some sort of a chapel here. . . ."

She was silent, but Matvei would say with a smile:

"Let them look. As soon as my son comes home, he will take care of them."

XII

Alexei appeared on a holiday, at the end of the second week of freedom. And how he looked when he appeared! Half a head taller than Matvei, broad-shouldered, lithe, with azure in his eyes. Matvei's heart grew great with joy, yet sadness moved in his soul at the same time: you couldn't carry such a one on your hands, you couldn't caress him. He had matured, grown tall . . . and the cursed fetters had not stopped him. He could lift anybody, carry him, comfort him.

The meeting did not pass without tears and small talk of little things. Alexei noticed the fetters on the wall during tea. He nodded at them, and asked: "Alive?"

"Alive. . . . They served their time in attics."

Matvei and Alexei looked into each other's eyes, and their laughter reverberated a long time. Matvei began to tell who kept the fetters, how long, and about the searches made for them. And then it was over, for comrades came to call Alexei to the

Soviet. At midday the suburb was informed that he would speak at a meeting in the evening.

The entire Anikanov family went to hear him. The square in front of the People's House was filled. Alexei, when he appeared on the platform, was met with shouts. His words flew upwards, around,—the first, the second, the third. They mounted rapidly, they beat at the crowd and put it on its guard. Even Vassili shivered at times with cold fever. Matvei's breast grew wider, his body lighter. Something called him to shout at the whole square that this Alyoshka was his son, that he, the old man, agreed with him in everything—to the last drop.

For a long time he could not quiet down. On the way home he muttered to his weeping wife, to the silent Vassili and to the daughter-in-law that life had come to them, but that it should have come before,—and everything would have been different; Vassili would not have become deaf in the boiler room, his old back would not have tortured him, mother would not have been so quiet and sorrow-stricken. . . .

That evening was the beginning. They almost never saw Alexei at home. He passed the nights rarely there, he would run in for a minute or two during the day, between two jobs. He was awaited everywhere, everybody needed him. He did not notice his own fatigue. From the strain his face became thinner, his eyes brighter, his voice rang louder.

At the end of March the Soviet sent him to the capital. He ran into the house before his train left. He kissed everybody and was in a hurry. Matvei, Vassili and a son-in-law took him to the station. He squeezed himself into a car with great hardship, nodded, and disappeared.

The Anikanovs saw him no more. News reached them that in the capital he had begun hating the new power and had gone as a volunteer to the front. And in the beginning of fall more news rolled their way: in the trenches Alexei had persuaded soldiers to leave for home with their rifles, and was killed by his own for that. . . .

In a few days the last dark patches of Matvei's hair faded into greyness. Greenish phosphoric sparks of tormenting grief came to life in his eyes, and remained there. He became thinner and more silent. Even in the autumn when the power was taken over by the workers and the soldiers, he remained indifferent to everything. As was his habit, he rarely went to meetings, rarely listened to new speeches, looked around unbelievably, searched for something in the faces around him, and walked away apathetically.

The end of the war horrified him. Russia seemed little to him and plucked of its feathers. The soldiers wandered back from the front, gloomy and depressed. The front rose in his imagination, a wide field cut in twain by a ditch. From the ditch cries, howls, mockery, laughter, beat at the sagging,

humbled backs. His heart was small in him. And Alyoshka, his own Alyoshka, was no more.

An unexpected event brought Matvei back to life once more. In the beginning of winter a memorial meeting for Alexei was arranged in the factory club. Matvei heard that a portrait of his son, drawn from a photograph, was already hanging there, and that at the meeting one of his letters would be read, a letter written before death. He came back to life, straightened up, and answered the invitations with a brave mutter:

"I will come, I will come, why not. . . ."

But when he was asked to present the fetters of Alexei to the club, he lost himself, sank into himself, and refused.

"I won't give them. . . ."

"Why?"

"Because. I have enough place for them at home. . . ."

They could get nothing else out of him. He sent Vassili to the meeting instead of going himself. He himself approached the club twice that night, but could not go in. He clenched his hands in his pockets and whispered:

"He won't come back, words won't bring him back. . . ."

Vassili sat in the first row that evening, listened, and wondered all the time. He found out that the death of his brother was a calamity for workers, that his brother was not that Alyoshka he knew and imagined, but some one greater, more necessary,

dearer, unforgettable. But what struck him most were the words about his brother's fetters. It seemed that they, too, were not simple, dead iron,—their clanking told the factory and the city of freedom, it woke the sleeping. . . .

XIII

The rich were being put out of their homes. Stores, warehouses, shops and schools were being taken over by the Soviets. The factory and the railroad were in the hands of their own. Superintendents, foremen became smaller, quieter, and some of them disappeared altogether. Everything seemed freer, simpler. It seemed that with just a little more effort and patience everything would be perfect.

But wood, coal, bread, and kerosene were thawing away. And suddenly it was noticed that goods, food, things, disappeared in attics, in the ground, in cellars. One could feel and see everywhere, behind corners, a hidden something that was hurt, a something that had been pushed out of its rut, a something that threw the sand of doubt into your eyes and whispered: "Well, well . . . let's see you build, let's see you make something." The thing laughed, and used rumour and whispers to create melancholy, timidity, anguish.

Money was losing its value more and more quickly. The days pushed up against something mysterious and threatening. The factory was filled

all winter with the glow of something evil, something that informed the souls of all with doubt, disappointment, apathy. The shops were working more and more slowly and lazily,—men did not earn enough to live on.

And one day in the spring there was an unusual sob of the siren, the lathes stopped, the iron was silenced. The workmen moved in a flood to the yard, toward the scaffold from which speakers addressed them, demanded to see the leaders, the representatives of the Soviet, and rained cries at them.

"What are you doing with us? . . . What are we working for?"

"Where is the bread? . . . What will happen next?"

"Where are your promises? . . . Why did you feed us on promises?"

"You put your hands on everything, but you can't do anything yourselves!"

Wrath and pain flamed in their eyes, drew their fists together,—made kindling wood of their words, and rattled wildly in their voices. They cursed, they reproached each other, they searched for the guilty ones and—and they could not find them.

Matvei looked around uncomprehendingly, listened, and felt the prevailing dread: there was no factory, everything had gone to the dogs. Last spring there was a factory, there was; there were thousands of hearts that were one, thousands of souls that were one, yes, one great soul. . . .

And what about Alyoshka, what about his words, his voice? They had filled them with the trembling of faith, they had made wings grow on their shoulders. . . . "Where is that? How can we get along without that? . . ."

Matvei did not finish his thought, he looked around in panic, grew quiet for an instant, choked with burning feeling. . . .

"At home, at home," he muttered, and rushed to his house.

His heart beat in his breast—drums. Without any words he took the fetters off the wall, put them under his coat, and slammed the door.

He hurried, he was afraid to be late, but he believed that it was not in vain that his heart was thumping. With a cry: "The floor! I want the floor!" he pushed into the storming crowd.

"What kind of a floor do you want? Don't push!"

"The floor!"

"Give the floor to Anikanov!"

"Give him the floor! Give Alexei's father the floor!"

"Give him the floor! Go on, Matvei!"

"Tssss. . . ."

Near the scaffold Matvei heard nothing and understood nothing. He leaped on the scaffold, shouted "Hush," ripped the fetters out from under his coat and lifted them high.

Their clanking crumpled up the voices. Matvei

choked on the silence that followed, found his breath with an effort, and asked hoarsely:

"Did you see?"

The crowd was coldly silent. For an instant Matvei thought that his heart had beaten in vain, but he straightened up, and asked again, wrathfully:

"You see it, all of you?"

In the back rows there thundered:

"All!"

And was caught up: "All, all, all!"—and rolled through the crowd.

Matvei stepped forward as if he wanted to throw himself at all of them, and cried from the edge of the scaffolding:

"Just look at yourselves! You've begun to bark like dogs! Well, do you want to do a little clanking in these? And you will clank in them, keep on tearing each other's throats and you will clank in them! They'll shut you up and put you into chains. One by one they'll put you into chains!"

For about a minute he shouted hysterically:

"They'll shut you up. They'll put you into chains!"

He stopped, lowered his hands, and descended from the scaffolding. After his hoarse cries, the clanking of the fetters sounded clear, ripped along the skin, wiped away the reproaches and the muddled disappointment. Many felt the chilly iron rings on themselves, and shuddered. This shuddering pushed one of the dissatisfied onto the scaffolding.

Just like Matvei, he choked with the silence and it was with an effort that his cry cut through it:

"We forgot what Anikanov told us! There is no going backward. . . . We've got to do our work ourselves. . . ."

They spoke little—it was hard to speak. They dispersed downcast. And the machines clattered again, the iron sang again under the hammers.

The day was given a name never heard before in the factory, in the city, and perhaps in the whole world—the day of the song of the chains.

XIV

After harvest, on a moonlit night, from the silence of the fields that embraced the city, rolled thunder. They were being attacked by enemies of their own blood. The factory shrieked its siren, wept, howled, tearing the heights and the threatening fields with its panic. In the rolling of its cries ran about part of the assembled workmen. The armed ones had gone out to meet the thunder, the unarmed ones went in a crowd to the city. And those who had remained established patrols, and began to bury half-finished ammunition, copper, steel, tools and machine parts in the ground behind the shops.

Matvei was not at the factory—he lay at home in the grip of fever. The call of the siren seemed to him to be the cry of a wounded man. He strained

to come to it, but he could not get up, and he hurried the slow Vassili:

"Go, Vass, you go at least. . . . Don't waste time. . . . Oh, Lord . . . don't anger me . . . maybe we won't see each other again."

The last shriek of the siren, the thundering shots, the explosions, cries, and hoof beats, he did not hear. Only in the morning, sleep let him escape from its powerful paws. He saw the two woven mats on the floor flooded with sunlight, he thought: "It seems I feel better," and stirred. His wife and his daughter-in-law, who were stuck to the window, turned to him.

"They took the city,—all the streets and the factory are surrounded," the daughter-in-law whispered. "They are going through the houses, taking listed men to the market place . . . maybe hanging them. Vassya hasn't come home. . . ."

"Hush, don't bother him," the mother interrupted her. "Better let us hide him. Get up. . . ."

"You are going to hide me?" wondered Matvei. "I won't hide."

"I am afraid, Matvei . . . it will make me feel more easy."

"Don't be afraid. . . . What ideas you get into your head! A triple curse on them!"

"Everybody is hiding."

"They are fools."

The granddaughter, panting, ran in from the vestibule, slamming the door.

"They are coming here . . . the storekeeper told

them about us. . . . That one, the officer, has a paper with him. There are three soldiers with him. . . ."

The mother, restless, sobbed, sat down near the feet of Matvei, and pointed out a place near her to the granddaughter.

"Sit down. Hush. Oh, Lord, keep them away from here. . . . Hush."

All of them stiffened. The voices from the street pricked at their temples. Matvei closed his eyelids, but opened them at once, and said with alarm:

"Mother, and the fetters? Hide them or they will take them away. . . ."

The granddaughter rushed to the chains, but, thrown back by approaching footsteps, sat down. An officer and three soldiers entered.

"Whose home? So. It is you who go around meetings with fetters? You are Anikanov?"

Matvei moved his tongue in his dry mouth, and rattled:

"I . . ."

"Aha. . . . Make the search."

The soldiers drove the women from the bed, looked under it, and began to open a trunk and a basket. The officer walked over to the bookshelf, saw the fetters on the wall, and uttered:

"A-a, there they are," and took them off the wall.

The clanking of the fetters seared Matvei.

"Put them back," he cried.

"Wha-at? Silence! See that we don't hang you!"

"Hang me, but don't touch them! They weren't saved for you!"

The eyes of the officer, gleaming, passed over the excited face of Matvei. He threw the fetters on the table and approached the bed.

"For what did you wear them, old fool? For politics? Come on, tell me. . . ."

Matvei's wife was shaking, she fell at the officer's feet and murmured:

"He did not wear them . . . he did not wear them . . . they are my son's, my son's. . . ."

"Where is that son?"

"Killed, killed in the war . . . don't listen to the old man . . . he is sick, he doesn't know what he is saying . . . he has had fever three days. . . ."

Matvei looked with amazement and anger at his praying, weeping wife, and cried hoarsely:

"Lick his feet, you rotten dog. . . ."

The officer changed countenance. He rocked backward, walked toward the window with disgust, and remained immovable while the search went on. Only his fingers drummed convulsively on his holster.

"That's all, your excellency."

"There is nothing?"

"Nothing."

"March."

The officer took the fetters, and followed the soldiers out, waving away the cries of Matvei and the whispers of the daughter-in-law about some piece of muslin.

Matvei struggled in the hands of his wife and granddaughter until he was strengthless. But at midday he managed to deceive them, and slipped away into the street. He was at the commandant's and saw some sort of colonel. He asked everybody where he could find the officer who had taken away the fetters and cried:

"They are mine! My son's!" and cursed.

At night he was picked up unconscious near the market-place, a bluish crimson mark from the butt of a rifle stretching from his cheek bone to his ear.

XV

A Red Guard was returning from his post through a suburban field in late autumn. His foot struck against something which clanked, he felt with his hands in the grass, and picked up the chains of Alexei Anikanov. Their links were gilded with rust, the leg guards were black with earth. . . .

"The devils," and the Red Guard shook the fetters. Along with the dust, along with the withered grass blades and the flying rust, the wind lifted the clanking and wafted it over the fields.

THREE LOOMS

MARIETTA SHAGINIAN

THIS took place in Leningrad, last year, at the very height of the campaign to increase the productivity of labour. The textile union was living through troublesome days. The problem was to shift the female workers of the textile cotton factories from two to three looms. And in order to understand all the complexity of this problem, all the delicacies inherent in it, it was only necessary to pass some time in the headquarters of the Leningrad army of textile workers, in the Gubsoyuz, where at each conference you could see men and women whose names had become legends, men and women who had once performed miracles of underground work in Ivanov-Voznesensk, Yaroslavl, Kostroma, Orekhovo-Zuyev, and other textile districts. The honorary chairman of the union was Comrade Tiushin, a patriarch with the head of a Lev Tolstoy, with a shamefaced, childlike smile,—a large, soft man,—in high felt boots—an old workman whose past resembled a fairy-tale. At these conferences you could meet old textile workers, warriors of two revolutions, who had passed through prisons, convoys, and exile. Their biographies in

the archives of the union would fill you with child-like awe. The keeper of the archives himself, Comrade Perazich, with a face made transparent by years of imprisonment, with a noble grey head bent day in, day out, from morning to night, over the historical documents of the union, could add to these dry records, in his quiet voice, and with his blue eyes shining, stories that grew into your memory. These legendary people had once called a strike and inflamed the workmen because of the very same thing: the shift from two looms to three. But at that time the task was imposed on labour by capital. And now these same leaders were forced to conduct meetings in the textile factories and urge the workmen to accept what years ago they had themselves called "mean exploitation, prison labour, and a new noose around the neck of the toiler." It is not to be wondered at that the situation was so hard to meet and that in many it inspired serious fears.

II

But what did it really mean—the shift to three looms? In textile factories the experienced weaver tends two looms, which stand before and behind her so that on turning she can move from one to the other. The loom is started by a foreman and is dusted by a special woman attendant. The weaver works between starting and cleaning. Her work consists in watching that the thread is not torn in

the web, that the woof is worked correctly, and that a fresh spool is put into the cradle on time. In American factories technic is so far advanced that one weaver tends, if I am not mistaken, seven looms. But the norm in our factories was two looms, and they were always worked by experienced weavers. A new weaver, until she gained her experience, worked on one loom.

Manufacturers had long considered the shift to three looms. This was supposed to bring in tremendous profit, cutting one-third from the cost of labour. As the raise promised the weavers was infinitesimal, the direct profit was almost equal to the cost of labour saved. But when the manufacturers introduced this innovation, it created a storm, incensed the weavers, and was widely exploited by the underground workers for the purposes of agitation.

Then came the Revolution, threw out the manufacturers, gave the factories to the workers, and now Soviet economy demanded exactly the same thing that the manufacturers had wanted. The hands of the administration were bound,—there was not enough money to operate the factories which were tied up, the administration had to use everything at its disposal to increase production and save every penny possible. It asked the Union—Help the country! Win the fight for three looms!

The union had to face the Leningrad proletariat, the most powerful army of weavers in the world.

A delegates' meeting was called in one of the

factories,—the one named after Nogin. The chairman of the Union, the chairman of the Administration, the representatives of the district committee and many others,—in a word, society and power,—came to that meeting. It was a winter evening, and the gloomy city was dressed in whitish coats of snow. The Shlüsselburg district loomed like a ghost beside the white and slumbering Neva. An automobile rolled along like a ball, and it seemed as if it were gathering itself for a leap into the darkness, the unknown,—nothingness. On either side moved the historic factory buildings with their colourful necklace of lights—the factories where revolts burst out in the worst days of the reaction, where people heard the careful words and saw the bald head of Ilyich long before they shook the world. And at last, the old, low-built, window-eyed walls of the Pal factory, which had become the Nogin factory. The automobile stopped. Silently the passengers got out.

III

It was an evening of frost and angry wind. But the chilled arrivals had only stepped into the meeting hall when they became instantly warm, and even broke into a sweat.

Women workers filled the hall. So many had come that there was no place to sit,—they stood, breathing on each other's necks. The air was unbearably foul. It was as hot as in a bath. The

platform towards which we made our way was bare of chairs. Willy-nilly we had to stand. But before we could stand in our places we had to make our way to them, and that was rather hard.

The women looked angry. Their faces were red, their eyes gleamed. We were met by a hail of such abuse that my unaccustomed soul turned rabbit. Against my will I looked from the corner of my eye at the member of the District Committee. He walked as if nothing had happened, listening to what went on to either side of him as if he were sucking the abuse into himself as a barometer sucks in the pressure of the atmosphere. The fleshy chairman of the Administration fared worse than the others. He and his rich raccoon coat were subjected to a pitiless hail-storm of curses.

We were met by an embarrassed young man with a face that was covered by what seemed to be the last ounce of sweat in his system—the Red Director of the factory. Somehow he managed to drag us to the green table, and got a few chairs,—each had to serve for two, and the conference began, or rather, the cries in the hall decreased a trifle in volume.

It was as clear as two and two is four that the workers were enraged, that they did not want to work on three looms, that they would not be moved by eloquent reasons, and that in the end they would vote solidly against the proposition. It may be asked what words, what reasons, what compromises, what yieldings could have moved this excited, sus-

picious, and completely united crowd which was defending its own interests.

IV

The meeting began with partisan bickerings. At last the long and disorderly report of the Red Director on the theme "it is necessary to increase production" was finished. The Red Director had been born in the union house of the factory, he had grown to manhood before the eyes of the workers, he was a hereditary factory worker, he was their own man. He was listened to with sneers, often interrupted, there were sarcastic remarks. He had hardly finished, with a movement of the hand that meant: "anyway, you'll never persuade them, they've got the bit in their teeth," when the chairman of the Administration, the most unpopular person in the hall at that moment, rose to his feet. He stood immovably, waiting for the cries to cease, and then began to speak, quietly and without the least bit of bombast.

You think he offered them promises, compromises, palliatives, a raise, in a word all that one side offers to the other in the hope of victory? Just the opposite. He said:

"Girls, you say it is hard for you, we press too much, we rip the hide from you? You are perfectly right. What do you think—whom else can we press except you? Who'll carry us over the top, if you don't? Do you imagine that the capital-

ists will run your business for you? That the merchants and the foreigners will save your business for you? Who turned Yudenich away from Lenin-grad? You. Who hungered and suffered cold in the factories? You. Who started those factories working? You. And if you don't work until it hurts, we will not be able to continue your business, to open new factories, to give work to the unemployed, to fill the markets with goods, to satisfy the peasant. Without your help we can't do a damned thing. It can't be helped. It's up to you to make a last effort."

The last sentence sounded gay, and carried trust in it. It seemed as if all of us had turned into children who complained that they could not learn their lesson. "Well then, instead of one page you learn two, and I'll see how you make out." I don't know what they call this method in pedagogy. It was often used by Napoleon, and Napoleon was adored. For what? For the faith that men can accomplish miracles. Man loves the highest expression of his own strength.

The meeting hall became very quiet.

V

In the silence were suddenly heard the dry, dragging footsteps of weak old feet. A thin, ancient woman, wrinkled, with tightly stretched lips, with no eyebrows, her head covered with a clean white shawl, a heroine of toil, a weaver with forty years

of labour in Pal's factory behind her, approached the green table.

The old woman took the ends of her shawl in both hands, lifted them higher, and tied them under her chin. She coughed. And then she said in a businesslike voice:

"Well, girls, we'll try. You can tend three looms. Although I'm old, I can tend three looms. It isn't hard,—only give us clean thread, and it isn't hard."

Something suddenly seemed to have taken hold of the delegates—laughter, applause, cries: "Good for the old woman!" The stream of hundreds of wills had been turned, shaken, thrown into a new riverbed by an unseen hand. Yes, it was possible to do the work, and easy if they wanted to. And the delegates had begun to want—had begun to will, as every one who understands that the work is his own, wills. A second—and the fate of the shift to three looms was settled.

NOTES: BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL *

I. BABEL (BORN 1894)

Born in Odessa, of Jewish middle-class parentage. Studied Hebrew and the Talmud up to the age of sixteen. Also studied in the Russian high schools. His first stories were written in French, but after two years of experimenting with French composition, he turned to the Russian language. In 1915 he went to Petrograd, where, as a Jew, he lived in hiding, not having the right of domicile. In Petrograd he began to peddle his literary wares, but unsuccessfully, for the editors of the various journals felt that he was much better fit for a job in a grocery store. In 1916 he met Maxim Gorky, and this, according to Babel, was the beginning of his literary career. Gorky encouraged him and urged him to write.

Babel served in the Army on the Rumanian Front, then in the Cheka, later he was engaged in the Commissariat of Education, in requisitioning expeditions, in the Northern Army against Yudenich, as a reporter on Petrograd and Tiflis papers, as a worker in a printing shop, etc. By 1923 he finally "learned to express his thoughts clearly and not very diffusely." His stories first began to appear in 1924. The story included in this volume is one of his earliest and most typical ones. Unfortunately, Babel's peculiar idiom hardly lends itself to translation.

His sketches of Budenny's Red Cavalry Regiment and of the Odessa Jewish underworld are masterpieces of economy and concentration. Not a superfluous word, not an unnecessary touch. A powerful, surging, romantic mood,

* The biographical data for these notes were drawn from biographical sketches written by the authors themselves.—*Editor*.

skillfully concealed under an icy cover of objective realism lends to his sketches—rarely exceeding three or four pages—a unique epic quality. His adjectives are few but monumental. His paradoxes are surcharged with tragedy and humour. Babel feels the futility of many words, and of “tearing a passion to tatters.” He realises that he writes in an age of war, hunger, and revolution, and that any one of his readers has seen sights that are unforgettable, has heard words that are unutterable. Babel merely states, where another Russian would comment, analyse, and philosophise. This restraint creates a state of tension which communicates itself to the most indifferent reader.

VSEVOLOD IVANOV (BORN 1896)

One of the most outstanding writers of contemporary Russia. His early youth was spent in the Kirghiz steppes. Led a colorful, adventurous life—from circus clown to partisan (guerrilla) fighter. His literary god-father was Gorky, of whom Ivanov says: “I didn’t believe in good people,—it seemed to me that they pretend because of contempt for Man. But Gorky has upset all my ideas on this subject.”

Vsevolod Ivanov does not psychologise his heroes. One or two strokes, and a character is suggested. The flow of his narrative is elemental. Though his language is speckled with many localisms, it is invariably fresh, sparkling, potent. His subject is chiefly the Civil War. Like Babel, Ivanov, though a fellow-traveller, is inconceivable in a background other than revolutionary Russia. Ivanov is the author of many books, including the famous novel, *The Armored Train*, which has been dramatised and successfully produced by the Moscow Art Theatre.

N. N. LIASHKO (BORN 1884)

Liashko’s father was a tailor; his mother was a peasant. He received his education in a village parochial school.

He began to work as a messenger boy at the age of eleven. At fourteen he got a job in a machine shop. Worked in shops and factories in various Ukrainian industrial cities—Kharkov, Nikolaiev, Sebastopol, Rostov-on-the-Don, etc. In 1903 became an active member of the Bolshevik faction of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party. He served in many prisons for political offenses during the period of 1903-1914. In addition, he had been exiled and incarcerated in a fortress. He began to write in 1905; his first stories appeared in 1911. Since 1920 he has been one of the active members of "The Smithy," and one of the founders of "The Smithy" publishing organisation.

Essentially lyrical, deeply sensitive, Liashko, though a realist, is never crudely photographic. He is in search of generalisation and his images often become symbolical. The story in this volume is in Liashko's most characteristic manner.

VALADIMIR LIDIN (BORN 1894)

A fellow-traveller in his ideology, and a formalist in his art, Lidin is the typical offspring of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia, but modified and hardened by years of war and revolution. Upon leaving the University, Lidin fought in the World War and later in the Red Army. His first stories showing clear traces of Chekhovian influence were published in 1915. Since then Lidin has freed himself from this early influence, but not completely—he still is psychological and discursive, and fond of realistic detail. Lidin accepts the Revolution, but his style is not sufficiently attuned to the tempo of the last decade.

ALEXANDER NEVEROV (1886-1923)

Neverov's father and mother were tillers of the soil. With an education slightly above elementary, he worked as teacher in various village schools for over eleven years.

In 1915 he was drafted into the army. Later he shouldered his rifle to fight Kolchak. In 1920-1921 he and his family found themselves in the famine area. This part of his experience he utilised in one of the finest bits of post-revolutionary writing,—in the novel *Tashkent—the City of Bread*.

Neverov's first story saw light in 1906, but he actually grew to his real stature since the Revolution. His eye was always fixed on the village, particularly on the poor peasant. With rare sympathy and humour Neverov introduced to the reader various village types—the new woman, the peasant children, the red army men, etc. His stories always expressed a glowing faith in a brighter and happier life so characteristic of "The Smithy" group to which he belonged. He died of heart failure in 1923.

BORIS PILNIAK (BORN 1894)

Was born into a prosperous middle class family. His real name is Wogau, and he has "four bloods" coursing in his veins: German and Jewish from his father, Russian and Tartar from his mother. Pilniak received a good education, and at the age of fourteen his first story was published. His real literary strength, however, came to the surface only after the Revolution.

Pilniak is a fellow-traveller and he accepts the Revolution with Slavophile reservations. He accepts it mystically, the cataclysmic, destructive, purgative element in it. To him the history of Russia since Peter the Great is a terrible delusion, a nightmare. Europe is decadent. The Western solution of the problem facing Russia its fatuous and futile. Russia must get back to fundamentals, to her original path, to the pre-Petrine epoch, to the seventeenth century. From the very beginning the Revolution meant to him a welcome reversion to the past, a rejection of everything superimposed, alien, imitated, borrowed from the West. In his novel the *Naked Year*, we see old, conservative, wooden Russia, Rus-

sia of the village and the sleigh, rising in holy wrath against Russia of the city and the machine, of the school and factory. Ignoring the international impulse of the Revolution, Pilniak envisages in it the dawn of a great national recrudescence.

One can readily see that Pilniak's interpretation of history, so contrary to what is actually taking place in Russia, cannot be maintained very consistently. Indeed, Pilniak frequently forgets himself and begins to chant praises to the Bolsheviks, to the "Leather Jackets," to the austere, efficient men who are "resurrecting" factories. We feel this peculiar admiration in the "Law of the Wolf" included in this volume, while in the *Naked Year* the author grows so ecstatic over the "resurrected factories" that he exclaims: "Is there not a poem here a hundred-fold greater than the resurrection of Lazarus?"

This dual attitude of Pilniak is bound to result in vagueness and confusion. Little wonder that his style is so bizarre, so grotesque, so reminiscent of Biely and Remizov. He hurls at us fragments of phrases, fragments of thoughts, "ends without beginnings, beginnings without ends." Strange turns of speech, violent images, sentences that would bring any grammarian to despair.

PANTELEIMON ROMANOV (BORN 1884)

Brought up in a lower middle-class household, Panteleimon Romanov never completely emancipated himself from this early influence. On the whole, both in education and outlook, Romanov often discloses traces of the typical pre-revolutionary bourgeois intellectual. He began to write long before the Revolution, and he still is an old-fashioned realist writing in the tradition of the middle of the last century. His main failing is his intellectualism, his manner of positing a problem, and of solving it didactically; this is particularly true of his sex stories. Though quite voluminous, Romanov is not often and not much discussed by the

Russian critics, and seldom included in post-revolutionary readers and anthologies. Still, some of his stories are interesting bits of realistic depiction of Soviet life. Such a story is "Black Fritters."

LYDIA SEIFULLINA (BORN 1889)

Partly because of her origin—her mother was a peasant—partly because she had spent many years in the village as a teacher, Lydia Seifullina knows the psychology and the language of the peasant. She understands the village and she feels the Revolution—two factors that make her stories and novels indispensable to any one who wishes to obtain an intimate glimpse into the most obscure, most enigmatic, yet most potent force that is now conditioning the destinies of Russia. The traditional peasant themes found in the older Russian literature, Seifullina treats in an entirely new fashion, charging them with an entirely unprecedented dynamic significance. In her work we have neither the idealisations of a Turgenev nor the one-sided naturalism of a Bunin. The inertness, the savagery of the peasant, his distrust of the city intellectual, his primitive, instinctive passion for the soil, all these venerable themes are recreated and reanimated. In her work we see the mass of savage peasantry caught up by the irresistible onrush of history and hurled into the vortex of Civil War, Revolution, and Communism. The village is crude, brutal, suspicious and obstinate. Against this as the setting, Seifullina projects the luminous figures of a Virinea, or a Sofron, strong, earthy peasant-men and peasant-women, bearers of a new gospel, preachers of a new faith, dauntless rebels against the old, unmistakable heralds of the new.

MARIETTA SHAGINIAN (BORN 1888)

An Armenian of the upper middle class. Her father was professor in the University of Moscow. Upon graduating the University in 1912, she went to Germany where she

stayed for two years. In 1914 she returned to Russia and plunged into intensive educational activities, now managing a textile school in the Don Region, now reading lectures on the history of art and the problems of aesthetics.

She first appeared in print in 1905. In 1912 she published her well known *Orientalia*, a book of poetry rich in feeling and oriental colour, but often marred by sentimentality. This fault is also perceptible in the "Three Looms" included in this volume.

M. Shaginian is a fellow-traveller. Her benevolent and even "sympathetic" attitude toward the Revolution has, in the words of Trotsky "its source in the most un-revolutionary, Asiatic, passive, Christian and non-resistant point of view." Like Pilniak, she, in her twisted psychology and untenable position, is definitely a product of the transition period of the Russian Revolution.

VIACHESLAV SHISHKOV

A Siberian fellow-traveller, Shishkov was known to the reading public long before 1917. In a good, old-fashioned prose, he relates stories of the village and of the new tendencies among the peasants. Not infrequently he indulges in farcical depiction of the absurd forms that all modern ideas and practices take on in a milieu of traditional ignorance—now it is an amateur theatrical performance in a village, now the showing of a moving picture, now the putting up of a Soviet school. In this volume, however, Shishkov is shown in one of his less hilarious, more lyrical moods.

ALEXEY NIKOLAIEVICH TOLSTOY (BORN 1882)

A member of a collateral branch of the renowned Tolstoy family. His mother was a Turgenev. During the Civil War, Tolstoy was with the Whites, together with them emigrated to Europe and settled in France. Torn from his native soil, Tolstoy felt artistically impotent. With the

beginning of the *Smenovekhovtsi* (The Changing Landmarks Group), he declared himself a-political, accepted the new régime, and returned to Soviet Russia. As a writer of poetry as well as prose, Alexey Tolstoy had won recognition as far back as 1909. His stories are excellently told—vivid language, graceful humour, striking description, moving plots. They suffer in architectonics: most of them are structurally loose. As in "Azure Cities," so in most of his works, the reader is thrown impetuously from one scene to another, from one plane to another, without being given a chance to catch his breath or to orientate himself in the hurly burly of rapidly unfolding events.

MIKHAIL VOLKOV (BORN 1886)

One of the better proletarian writers, of peasant origin. At the age of thirteen he went to work in Moscow. His jobs ranged from day labourer, to petty office clerk, to church choir singer. Served in army during the World War. In 1918 he "accidentally joined the literary studio of the Moscow Proletcult," and the "gates into the enchanted realm of literature were opened" before him. He was one of the organisers of the "Smithy" group, and an executive member of the All-Russian Association of Proletarian Writers. First appeared in print in 1918.

MIKHAIL ZOSHCHENKO (BORN 1895)

A fellow-traveller of impoverished noble stock. Studied at the University of Petrograd. Left the University in 1915 and entered the army as a volunteer. Wounded, gassed, and promoted to captaincy. Then came 1917. In his humorous autobiographical sketch Zoshchenko tells of his Odyssey immediately after the Revolution. "Worked as carpenter, hunted wild game in Nova Zembla, hired myself out as a shoemaker's apprentice, was a criminal detective, a card sharper, served as a telephone operator, militia-

man, and railroad employé, tried the stage, and finally volunteered for the Red Army." In 1919 he left the Army, suffering from heart disease. His literary début was made in 1921, in the "Petersburg Almanach."

As a literary artist, Zoshchenko, despite his popularity, does not rank among the best. His stories, entertaining anecdotes, are told in the racy language and from the point of view of the man in the street. They burlesque the negative aspects of Soviet life. Zoshchenko's satire is rarely profound, but always amusing. The charm of his colloquial Russian, however, is inimitable.

GLOSSARY

- Andreievsky Hall.**—The former coronation hall in the Kremlin Palace.
- Decembrists.**—Participants in the military revolt of December 14, 1825.
- Dobrokhim.**—A voluntary organisation for the development of chemical industries.
- Dobrolyot.**—A voluntary organisation for the advancement of aviation.
- Donbass.**—The Donetz Basin, a mining and industrial region of the Ukraine.
- Drevtrust.**—Lumber trust.
- Great Vladimir Road.**—Highway used in the past to conduct exiles to Siberia.
- Gubsoyuz.**—Central organisation of the trade unions of a province.
- Ilyich.**—Patronymic of V. I. Lenin.
- Komsomol.**—League of Communist Youth; *komsomolets*, a member of this league.
- Kuznetsky Most.**—The main street in Moscow.
- Malakhai.**—A great-coat worn by Khirgiz tribesmen.
- Napostovtsy.**—Members of the literary group *Na Posty* (On Guard).
- N.E.P.**—Initials of the "New Economic Policy" instituted in 1921.
- Nucleus.**—The basic unit of organisation of the Communist Party.
- October.**—The overthrow of the Kerensky Government and the assumption of power by the Soviets took place on October 25 (Nov. 7, 1917, new style).
- People's Will Party.**—The party of pioneer revolutionists with a populist-socialist programme, which also practiced terrorism against Tsarist officials.
- Political Department.**—A department for political education of soldiers in Red Army regiments.
- Pugachov, Emelian.**—Led peasant uprisings from 1773 to 1775. Executed.
- Sarafan.**—The skirt of the bodice of a Russian peasant woman's costume.
- Stenka Razin.**—A Cossack who led a rebellion along the Volga in 1670. Executed in 1671 and became a hero of popular song and legend.
- Trial of the 193.**—A famous mass trial of revolutionists during the eighties.
- Yakutsk.**—A Siberian prison town known in revolutionary history.
- Yurta.**—A round tent made of a wooden frame covered with felt.

